UKRAINIAN LITERATURE: A JOURNAL OF TRANSLATIONS

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Ukrainian Literature

A Journal of Translations

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Shevchenko Scientific Society of Canada

Ukrainian Literature

A Journal of Translations

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Marta Tarnawsky, 1930–2021

Introduction

This issue of *Ukrainian Literature* is dedicated to Marta Tarnawsky, who passed away on January 26, 2021. I honor her not only because she was my mother, but because she was the founder of this journal.

Marta Tarnawsky was a poet, writer, translator, bibliographer, and librarian. Most importantly, she was a tireless civic activist promoting Ukrainian literature. Professionally, she was the Foreign Law Librarian at the Biddle Law Library of the University of Pennsylvania from 1967 to 1993. At her retirement, she held the post of Associate Director for Foreign and International Law. Yet she took an early retirement from the law library in order to focus her energy on her own creative work and on civic involvement in the Ukrainian community. In particular, she was the head of the Publications Committee of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in the US (NTSh-A) from 2000 to 2006. It was in this capacity that she finally succeeded in realizing a long-held dream—the establishment of a permanent forum for the publication of English translations of Ukrainian literary works. She had advocated for such a publication for many years. As the foremost bibliographer of literary translations from Ukrainian into English (her four-part magnum opus, *Ukrainian Literature in English*, is still the primary source of information on this topic), she was acutely aware of the need for such a forum. And through her advocacy within NTSh-A (and after twisting my arm and using all her

motherly influence to overcome my reluctance to take on this assignment), the journal *Ukrainian Literature: A Journal of Translations* was established as an ongoing publication of the Shevchenko Scientific Society of the US. Although NTSh-A no longer sponsors the journal, its existence is worth celebrating, and the person who most deserves credit for the vision and effort to establish it is certainly Marta Tarnawsky.

Of course, not everything about the journal lived up to Marta's expectations. Above all, she wanted the journal to be effective and influential in promoting Ukrainian literature in the English-speaking world. For her, that meant that printed copies of the journal would be in the hands of as many readers as possible and, even more importantly (she was a librarian, after all), on the shelves of libraries throughout the world. Unfortunately, that has not happened. The number of printed copies of all five volumes of the journal that are in circulation is very small. This was something that I anticipated. In my initial agreement to take on this journal, I insisted that the publisher handle all matters associated with the print version, while I would concentrate on the internet version. I still believe that the latter is a far more important venue for this journal—a place where the translations it contains are available to everyone around the world at no cost, and without the need to locate an actual copy of the printed volume and deliver it into the reader's hands. Also, there the contents will remain available in perpetuity, unlike books that disappear when their publishers retreat or fail to keep a book in print (without, moreover, releasing the rights to others—thus making texts permanently unavailable).

But my mother's preference for print over electronic publication was not just the prejudice of an older generation—this bias still dominates the world of literature, particularly Ukrainian literature. Authors and translators prefer books, even when the financial incentives point the

other way. This journal has lost translations intended for its pages because an author later balked at publication in a journal or a translator preferred to see the work in book form, even though its potential publisher required a subsidy while the journal would have paid an honorarium. The machinery of the Ukrainian translation industry is geared toward books. The Ukrainian Book Institute of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine will subsidize for profit publishers who accept a Ukrainian translation for publication as a book, but not in a journal. Translation prizes in North America are for books, not journals. An internet journal may be convenient for university students or for those who read on electronic devices, but authors and translators still prefer the look and feel of a paper book in their hands, even if that means storing boxes of them in the basement.

Marta Tarnawsky's goals in founding this journal were not limited to promoting printed works. Translations themselves were the goal. Fortunately, the availability of Ukrainian literature in English is growing. That increase is largely limited to the work of living authors, some of whom may not fare as well as others with the next generation of readers. The success of contemporary Ukrainian authors with commercial publishers is certainly a positive development, although it is usually limited to subsidy-seeking niche publishers. This journal still has a vital role to play in stimulating translations of those authors and works that are not part of the ongoing commerce of profitable literature. Most of Ukrainian literature is still in this category. And as for the distinction between print and electronic, between book and journal, I promise that some of the larger works that first appeared in this journal will soon also appear as bound paper and ink, flesh and blood books, that readers can purchase and hold in their hands.

* * *

In tribute to Marta Tarnawsky, this volume of the journal opens with translations of three of her works, by Uliana Pasicznyk and me. Uliana has translated an early, dare I say feminist, piece that captures Marta's thoughtfulness and irony. I could not resist translating the story about a child on the beach, since it's about me, or at least I was the pretext for it. "American Tryptych" is one of her more important works. I don't pretend to be a good translator of poetry, but this highly autobiographical poem, even in my pedestrian translation, showcases my mother's characteristic blending of the civic and the personal. My parents did arrive in the US at Boston on the USS Mercy (AH-8) and then went to Scranton PA, where my mother worked as a seamstress for the Lackawanna Pants Manufacturing Company. They later moved to Philadelphia, where her father paid for her university education, while my father volunteered many hours at the UUARC, the organization that had helped bring so many refugee Ukrainians to the USA. In the final section of the poem, which she translated herself, she pays tribute to Morris L. Cohen, who was her boss at the Biddle Law Library and a lifelong friend.

This volume also contains a special section of poetry. In the summer of 2020, Alex Averbuch, a poet and a graduate student in the department where I teach, organized an online Festival of Contemporary Ukrainian Poetry. It ran weekly from July 2 to August 20, 2020, and included sixteen poets. The event was sponsored by the Danylo Husar Struk Programme in Ukrainian Literature of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, and the recorded sessions of the festival are available on the programme's website (http://sites.utoronto.ca/elul/Struk-mem/Writers-series/2020-Poetry-Festival.html). Alex had the further idea of organizing English translations of selected poems by

each of the festival participants. The result is this volume's long, special section, where the poems appear both in the original and in translation on facing pages. The publication of these poems has its own intrinsic value but is also meant as an extension of the festival itself. Alex Averbuch tells us more of this story in his introduction to the special section.

No less special, although not a surprise since it was previously announced, is the conclusion of Oles Ulianenko's *Stalinka* in Olga Rudakevych's masterful translation. I commented on this work in the previous issue, so here I will only say that I am delighted this important novel is now available in English in its entirety.

The volume also contains some familiar authors (Andrukhovych, Kononenko, Kobylianska) and some new ones (Yatskiv and Volvach). It is rounded out by a complicated work from the pen of an unjustly forgotten diaspora modernist author, Ihor Kostetsky (aka Eaghor Kostetzky, 1913–1983), whose real name was Ihor Merzliakov. Although he is better known for his theatrical works and literary criticism, his somewhat experimental prose is also worthy of attention. I am very happy to offer readers the pleasure of discovering this work and all the other works in this issue of the journal.

Maxim Tarnawsky
Toronto, November 16, 2021

The Gift

Marta Tarnawsky

“Ah, but a man’s reach should always exceed his grasp…”
Robert Browning

The suitcase was made of smooth light-brown calfskin and had bright golden clasps. Lida already imagined it covered with colorful stickers from hotels in London, Paris, and Madrid.

“I’ll take it,” she said firmly.

The shop clerk launched into complimenting other items in his store and quickly opened a second suitcase. This one was entirely like the first on the exterior, but its silken interior was divided specifically into compartments for ladies’ wear.

“An elegant pair of suitcases for an elegant pair of travelers,” he said cheerfully and expectantly, waiting for the words to call forth her response.

“No, thank you. I’m not interested,” she said abruptly. Seeing the disappointment on the clerk’s face, she smiled.

“Maybe later sometime…”

As he wrote up the receipt, Lida stood holding out several banknotes, her thoughts already far away.

She was revisiting her conversation with Andrii. Now that the decision was made, she was entirely at ease. Sometimes it seemed to Lida that she could observe the whole situation like an outsider, disconnected from her own feelings, as Oscar Wilde had advised. Or were those just other feelings taking over? A human is an *animal émotionnel*, Andrii said. Always a captive to feelings.

If only it hadn’t been obligatory to sign that contract with the company! Even so, two years wasn’t such a long time. They would pass quickly, practically unnoticed, like a breeze. Quickly—and irreplaceably. But why this “irreplaceably?” Hopeless sentimentality. That was the flaw in all this. You had to think with your head, not your heart. *Ratio*, *ratio*—not *emotio*.

In the crowd of people leaning against the cold and damp walls of the station as they waited for the subway, she chanced on Mrs. Kachmar.

“So, where are you going?” asked Mrs. Kachmar, glancing down curiously at the sturdy suitcase that Lida had carefully put down beside her.

“Between the suburbs and downtown—there and back,” Lida laughed. “Just like you,” she said, nodding toward the five colorful packages Mrs. Kachmar was struggling to keep aloft. “Like everyone else here.”

“Everyone else” was the multitude of individuals in multi-hued coats, loaded down with bags, packages, and boxes of every kind after the weekly Friday evening downtown shopping—now all packed together in the subway car and heading home.

“And the suitcase? What about that? You bought it? That’s a man’s bag—double straps, double handles, a ‘two-suiter,’ isn’t it?”

How has she managed to spot all that? marveled Lida silently.

“A present for my husband,” she answered.

“Is he going somewhere?”

How easily people ask such questions! Where are you going, with whom, for what, where do you work, how much do you make? Lida didn’t know how to pose such questions freely and directly. To her, they amounted to breaching the barriers around somebody’s private life. Other people’s spontaneous persistence always surprised her.

“No, it’s a birthday gift.”

She felt annoyed at being obliged to lie. She didn’t lie well, which was immediately evident.

“But why a suitcase, my dear? A suitcase is a dangerous present!”

“It’s a symbolic gift. So he knows that he’s totally free and can go wherever he likes.”

Lida was trying to joke, in an effort to veil her discomfort.

“What do you mean? And in your condition! You’ve got one still in diapers and another one on the way, and you’re talking about your husband’s freedom? Don’t you know that there are plenty of men in that situation out there who choose freedom over difficult responsibilities? They do, for sure, and without suggestions from their wives or symbolic gifts!”

Mrs. Kachmar’s sister was the source of this experience. Her husband had left her and their little daughter Nina after three years of marriage. Now Nina was with her aunt every day as her mother did factory work. For Mrs. Kachmar, the problem was close and painful.

Lida said nothing in response, and the other woman, sensing her discomfort, changed the topic. Before getting off, she smiled at Lida and tried to smooth things over.

“Maybe we should get a suitcase like that too. Then maybe we’d do some traveling. It wasn’t very expensive, was it?”

“No, not very,” said Lida.

It cost what she had been setting aside for months, intending to buy her first-ever evening gown. Why? she now asked herself—to catch up belatedly on her youth? Or to begin a second one, since the first had been lost in the war? And now here it lay—that amount, that dress, that youth, in a rectangle made of light-brown calf’s leather.

Tenderly she fingered one of the strong leather straps. What did she need an evening dress for? She couldn’t dance now, anyway. And she wouldn’t be dancing later either,

when Andrii was gone. If only it would happen already. The worst part was the uncertainty and the wait.

She began musing about the letters he would write her. Such rich, lush letters. They'd be about the Louvre, the Sorbonne, Notre Dame. About the boulevards along the Seine. About openings at art galleries. And she would write to him—about Roma's development and about little Nestor (Nestor—for sure!). And about life here. In detail and as it really was, the way he liked her descriptions to be. And she wouldn't write too often, or about her feelings. She'd deal with her loneliness privately, away from everybody, rereading his letters ten times by the lamp on her nightstand, alone with his still-lifes and landscapes.

Let him go. He absolutely has to go. Another opportunity like this might never come again. It's just what he needs right now. An exciting environment, abounding in creativity, a shot of bohemian enthusiasm. And impressions—new impressions, new experiences, new emotions—to broaden his horizons, to deepen his reaction to the world around him.

This is not the way they had planned his pilgrimage to the Mecca of art and culture. His role as draftsman and project director would still fill an 8-hour workday, just as it did here. But there, his working hours would include half of every night, as well as all those countless hours that he dedicated here to Lida, Roma, and the chores of home ownership.

There was nothing else to say. The benefits that would come from a two-year stay were obvious. Lida can already see new canvases illuminated by joyful golden sunshine. The illusion carries her off, and she herself begins to imagine new projects, ideas, subjects—lovely new paintings. Andrii's paintings. And then, maybe, a third year in that exuberant capital. A year of real creativity, a year of culmination. And afterwards, a one-man show at a Parisian

gallery with one of those magical names that would open wide the doors of the whole art world …

At home, the adolescent babysitter sat engrossed in the television screen and didn't notice Lida until she turned on the lights in the dining room. Roma was already asleep, but toys still cluttered the whole house and on the kitchen table the toddler's plates stood unwashed.

A couple of years of carefree bachelor life in a delightful foreign city. After that, how easy would it be to again take part in ordinary, everyday life, to return heart and soul to a home full of children's activity and commotion, to family concerns?

Paid for her two hours of caring for Roma, the babysitter turned the television off and left. In complete silence, Lida was again alone with her thoughts. She tidied up the rooms and waited for Andrii.

Tonight's meeting must be running late. She lay down on the living room couch and half-closed her eyes. She was tired. Shopping downtown always tired her out. Not only because of the hours spent going from store to store but, mainly, because of the crowds of people there. Crowds always wore her out and frightened her. Now there was another reason, obliging her to rest more frequently. Would she be able to manage it all on her own? She would have to write her aunt and ask her to come down for a week or two. She didn't like to ask for help—she always sought to be independent. But now she would have to. Her biggest concern was for Roma: this would be a hard time for the little girl. Someone from the family would have to stay with her while Lida was in the hospital. Later, everything would get sorted out somehow. After all, other women managed on their own, and she had never lacked good-natured enthusiasm or energy, and she didn't fear physical effort. If only this wave of weakness would recede quickly. Once Nestor was born, everything would surely fall into place.

With Andrii’s arrival a cheerful freshness entered the house, as if a strong and lively sea breeze had unexpectedly blown through the opened door. He greeted her with bright, smiling eyes, impatiently tossing back his shock of unruly blonde hair. There was a sort of boyish tenderness about him, making Lida recall something vague and indistinct yet close and familiar from her childhood.

“Wi-i-fe! I’m starving!” he sang out in his pleasant baritone.

She knew that their serious talk had to wait until after dinner. “You can’t discuss such things on an empty stomach,” he’d once good-humoredly declared, and afterward he’d faithfully kept to this folk wisdom. She didn’t want to breach that tradition now.

He asked a lot about Roma. Unhurriedly enjoying the meal, he listened to the details of Roma’s accomplishments during the day, laughing heartily at the toddler’s antics as if at the wittiest of jokes.

“And what’ll it be like when little Vera joins the party?!”

The expected baby whom Lida thought of as Nestor was Vera to Andrii. “What a lovely creature a little girl is!” he’d often say. Lida sometimes thought he did it on purpose and for her sake, because he knew how much she wanted the baby to be a boy, since she was convinced that Andrii very much wanted a son. He was readying the stage in advance to spare her a possible disappointment. That was very much his way.

“Lida,” he said, suddenly serious. “I talked with the boss today.”

“And?”

“I won’t be going to France.”

“What do you mean?” She was nearly shouting. “But that’s not right! We decided—”

“Not we, Lida, but you—and now I have made a different decision.”

There was not a trace of agitation in his voice. He spoke directly, calmly, nearly tenderly. Maybe he was right—Lida had been so absorbed in coming to her own decision that she hadn't really considered what his might be. She had been absolutely certain that Andrii's own wish was to go.

"Why?" She now spoke in a whisper.

But she didn't give him a chance to answer. All the great anxiety, pain, and sadness that had been brewing in her over the last couple of weeks boiled over into an uncontrollable spasm of weeping.

"We are to blame! We're the ones keeping you back! We're the constant brake on your career. Family and children are weighing you down. You stick by your wife and can't move forward. Why did you marry? Now you won't go, and then you'll always regret it. Don't deceive yourself: you'll never have another chance like this! You'll regret it, and silently curse us. You'll never forget that we stood in your way. Then a rift will arise between us. One bigger than an absence of two or three years would create…"

He waited until she had quieted.

"Lida," he said. "You are the kind of person who strives at any cost to be heroic. You want the satisfaction of having made a sacrifice. That's an egotistical trait!"

Lida, offended, fell silent.

"You want to see me as a genius. You identify yourself with me, and so my success becomes your success too. That, too, is egotistical. This is not an accusation against you. We are all egoists; we all want to satisfy our own egos. And egoism comes in different types. Yours is a noble egoism. It brings benefit to someone else—and leaves you on the moral high ground."

Lida said nothing.

"I am not a genius, Lida. I know and love art too much not to recognize my own shortcomings. That's not morbid self-criticism. I also recognize what I have to offer. I am a decent, perhaps even quite good artist, Lida—one of the

hundreds in every country. And, you must understand, artists like that are important. Without them, any true culture would be impossible. They form the foundation from which true genius can spring."

Are these the cries of maturity? thought Lida, surprised at her own thinking. As children, each of us believes that we are a special being with an extraordinary destiny before us. Only gradually does life itself bring us to our senses, make us realize that we are just a single grain of sand in the infinite sand of the sea, where entire rivers of the past, present, and future flow.

"I won't leave you on your own, Lida, at what may be the most demanding time in your life, to go search for some illusory fantasy—"

"You want to sacrifice yourself too!" Lida interrupted.

He let out a laugh.

"Maybe that's true—who knows! Maybe an old-fashioned, petty-bourgeois sense of responsibility is what's winning out."

Lida was trying to fight him with his own weapons, and that was making him light-hearted. His eyes again had a boyish gleam.

Lida went out into the garden, wanting to collect her turbulent thoughts. There, in solitude and under the stars, how petty human ambitions seemed.

His warm, strong hands on her shoulders startled her.

"I was alone in life for a long time, Lida, and I don't want to live like that again."

Lida gazed up at the stars, sparkling in the dark-blue dome of the heavens.

"None of us can escape our essential solitude," she said quietly.

"But there are times when we can. And then—that's our only true desire. For me, love is one such effort to shed absolute solitude. And can it be that just that ephemeral,

uncertain, and illusory escape is the quintessence of our human existence?”

Lida gazed on at the darkness, her hot cheeks cooling in the soft night air. Anguish rolled out from her heart like a shooting star swirling into eternity. And then she understood: her private, unexpressed, half-formed and yet painfully fervent wish was being fulfilled.

“But I’ve already bought you a suitcase!” she remembered suddenly, and fell silent.

Translated by Uliana Pasicznyk

Original publication: Marta Tarnavs'ka, “Stara istoriia” [Title changed to “Podarunok” in later publications], *Nashe zhyttia*, Oct. 1958, 5–8.

The Little Man and the Sea

Marta Tarnawsky

A water-filled moat encircled the hill and castle, and beyond it were high ramparts and a palisade, with openings for archers-defenders. There were also three drawbridges over the moat, but they were not actually built. Even his brother Mark couldn't manage to do that, and he is the older one here. The bridges got destroyed every time the enemy appeared on the scene. Then they were rebuilt. On the highest tower of the prince's castle fluttered a flag. The blue ribbon from mom's dress was perfectly suited to be a flag. Attached to the handle of a broken shovel, it fluttered in the wind like a real flag, and was reflected with sparks of pride in the pupils of Mark the Builder.

When a tar barrel caught fire nearby—a sign that the Tatars were attacking the castle—the bridges were destroyed first, and then a real battle ensued. Maxim liked this. Destroying the castle with sand balls was much more interesting than building it. Stepping one foot into the castle yard, he tore down the guard tower and triumphantly pulled out the shovel with the blue ribbon. His brother's punches made it clear to him that such heroics were undesirable. Running away, he threw the blue ribbon into the watery moat. His angry brother rushed to catch him but must have changed his mind, for he abruptly stopped and turned back to his castle.

Maxim ran to the ocean. Last year he would have run away from this water “coming at me,” frightened by the roar of the surf, but now he is at one with the sea. “I like this big pool,” he says to his mother. “Who invented it? God? And who poured in the water?”

Maxim takes a few steps into the water and watches as a noisy, white-maned wave rolls toward him. The wave breaks far ahead only white foam reaches Maxim, and then spreads in wide arcs on the sand. Emboldened, Maxim takes a step forward and tries to catch a handful of the white sea foam in his small hands. “Why is the foam in the sea white?” He is already running to his mother, to pester her with questions.

The beach, like a huge flower garden, burns with bright colors. Their large umbrella, green with yellow stripes, is just over there. Maxim runs over and stops at a green beach chair. He stares hesitantly for a moment at the woman wrapped in a white towel. His small eyes are surprised. It's not mom. He hears a familiar phrase in a foreign language, “Hi there, little boy” but Maxim catches sight of another green umbrella and runs there, not looking back.

The shovel he lost this morning is here, on the sand. Ah, what joy! He had been looking for it. He must tell Mark he found it. But neither Mark nor his castle are anywhere to be seen. The castle reminds him of his brother’s punches and his own forgotten guilt. The boy looks around for the green umbrella again. But here again, unknown faces gaze at him indifferently from under wide straw hats.

Searching, he randomly made his way down the beach. He did not let go of his newly found shovel. Only slightly smaller than he was, it dragged along behind him, bouncing over scattered shells, and leaving an uneven, barely visible trail on the sand.

Again he went toward the ocean. Near the water’s edge some boys had dug a channel into the water, and a stream of waves was rocking the boys’ boats in it. One was an aircraft carrier—just like the one in the shop window yesterday. And next to it a yacht with three sails and a small Indian canoe. The boys were now digging a second channel, and Maxim looked on with interest at their work.

“Our Dnipro’s the largest river, And on its waves the sailboats glimmer...”—he knew this rhymed tale by heart.

But it immediately reminded him of his mother. He left the boys and started searching for their umbrella again.

He was no longer looking for a green one with yellow stripes but looked under each umbrella. But everywhere there were the same strangers—tanned people wearing dark glasses and hats made of colored straw.

A large paper kite climbs into the sky. A black monster is painted on its red surface, and a long tail of thin colored ribbons is attached to its end. For a moment it becomes a terrible black monster, but the kite is already fluttering in the wind, the pattern on the red paper no longer visible. The kite becomes a spot of color in the big blue sky. The sky is dotted with white clouds, like lambs. However, Maxim already knows that rain comes from clouds, and rain frightens him. True, he does wonder what happens to the sea when it rains—will there be thunder? Better to find mom already. Again he looks under the colored umbrellas for a familiar smile.

A tourist boat sails near the shore. Children on the beach shout and wave to the passengers. Maxim, too, laughs and shouts. He has already sailed on this ship, and it was so nice! Seagulls had flown up close to him and just snatched pieces of food from his hands. Some day he will sail by ship far away, to the other side of the ocean, to that place where mom, pointing, says: “Ukraine is over there.” But in fact he does not believe it takes all that long to get to this other side: he can see that the end of the sea is not so far away.

The hot sun is beating down on Maxim's back, the shovel weighs down his hand and gets in the way. The sound of a loudspeaker reaches him from the boardwalk, but it is almost drowned out by the tide. Besides, it’s in a foreign language—and what’s that to him? Even if it is about a lost, blond, four-year-old boy in blue shorts.

On a blanket nearby sits a little girl eating cherries. Her mother just took them out of a bag and is handing them to the child one by one, having first bit into them and tossed

the pits into the bag. The girl looks at Maxim with mocking eyes, her small mouth smeared with red cherry juice. Maxim really wants cherries. He looks sadly at the girl, puts the thumb of his right hand in his mouth, and sucks, sucks ...

Suddenly, behind him, his mother’s voice echoes. His mom! Full of happiness, he flies into his mother’s arms. “Mom, mom! I want some cherries!” He shouts loudly and cheerfully, wondering why his mother looks so angry, and why there are tears in her eyes.

1959

Translated by Maxim Tarnawsky

Original publication: Marta Tarnavs'ka, “Mala liudyna i more,” *Nashe zhyttia*, July—Aug. 1959, 6–8.

American Triptych

Marta Tarnawsky

The land was ours before we were the land's.
Robert Frost, "The Gift Outright"

The First Discovery of America

1. *Navigare necesse est*

Sailing is just another adventure.
When you're eighteen years old,
the proverb that "sailing is required,"
seems like a lifelong motto,
and though the sailors in the port sang
a German song about the death of a dream —
Bremerhaven remained indifferent.
The U.S.S. Mercy no longer carried soldiers
to strengthen the European front—
she was returning home with cargo,
her last sailing across the ocean,
she carried an unusual cargo to her native harbor.
A hospitable gesture to those shortchanged by war.
And the gates to the future opened…
I too am on deck with my closest kin.
The war is now a distant memory—
a childhood peeled off like a shell,
and I am all aflame with the excitement of the day
I am all expectation. Youth has passed already,
and so too Salzburg's beauty, love's sanctuary.
But what comes next? What is my future?
Uncertainty, anxiety—that's what's ahead,

and that small slice of wisdom already won:
to catch in handfuls every drop of joy
immerse yourself in the moment's rapture
and live—right now, today, and every moment.

There's land on the horizon for a while now,
but suddenly, out from the mist,
rise ghostly figures hanging in the air—
skyscrapers, which I've never seen before.
A sudden wakening, a blow
as if a turn into the actual and real,
this is in fact a different continent.
The sea has been a Rubicon for me,
the bridges burnt, no longer can there be
return to that place where I've left
my childhood, youth, and Europe.

2. First lesson in democracy

A cold wind blows off the ocean
but he's without a coat; this grey haired
fellow, with his straggly, wind-blown mane,
his jacket casually open, and his tie
fluttering in the wind like a flag.
Who is he, this stranger? A Bostonian?
An agent of the immigration bureau?
Or someone's sponsor? Or maybe just
a passerby, then wandering along the quay
as our ship was arriving at the harbor
and lanky passengers emerged into the sun
from cabins where they'd huddled on their voyage
onto the deck, to see, with wondering eyes
the dock, the port, the place where they would land.
The band stuck up a cheerful sound:
"Oh say," we heard, triumphantly, "can you see?"

An anthem played to greet us, as if in a parade.
And yet the unknown fellow stands
At ease, unburdened, lost in thought
and looking out into the ocean,
while I remember anthems played not long ago
with rows of boys and girls arrayed in lines
observing goose-step marching soldiers,
coordinated moves by monolithic crowds
accompanied by military tunes.
In all that discipline, there was no room
for a disdainful, independent stance,
for pacifists, ignoring martial customs
to stand aside, bemused and inattentive
with hands in trouser pockets, far from a salute.
There were the songs of patriotic ardor,
the fatherland above all else
and everything you have, and what you'll be
you owe to it, and to it pledge your life,
not in one moment, but forever more.
They taught that we were cogs in a machine,
Alone we're nothing, the collective is all.
There is no noble feeling greater
than pride in watching our flags flutter
than shouting "heil" or "glory" in a crowd
than raising hands in a salute with other.
Such was my childhood, this was not strange to me
a youngster in tight rows with fellow scouts
I loved to march and watch the wind-blown flags.
But now, from the ship's deck I watch
as this undisciplined civilian man
listens unmoved as his own anthem sounds,
and I am moved.
I understand at last:
This is a citizen of a free country
He's not a victim, slave, or pawn,
He's not the dung of empires and leaders.

And in my thoughts, I stretch my arms
into the future—into tomorrow. I hope
I too will someday raise my head
and proudly know the most important value—
that simple human dignity the world forgot.

3. *E pluribus unum*

The anthem's over. A row of speakers
to the microphone stands patiently in line,
the first of them begins his greeting.
I don't know who he is or what he said.
No doubt about how welcome we should feel
how readily we'll be accepted and what awaits us:
prosperity and peace and fruitful labor,
more valued here than elsewhere in the world.
This country was, from its inception
built by hard working hands of immigrants
and we, like they, are its prospective citizens.
We'd heard so many speeches in the past
in praise of peace but promising a war,
that promised paradise but delivered hell
we weren't about to fall for empty words.
Besides, the effort is in vain. Who listens
to words they cannot understand?
These words are in a foreign language
the speaker is twofold removed from us:
mistrust and by the barrier of language.
But here, the second speaker takes the stage
He's from the sponsors, UUARC
"Brothers and sisters, dearest countrymen…"
He opens, in the language that's our own.
Ukrainian words, like a warm breeze from home
like a spring thaw amidst a stormy season
a sign that winter's over, summer's coming,

and in this place, we are indeed at home.

The Second Discovery of America

1. Lackawanna Manufacturing Company

I am so fresh from European schooling
that Latin phrases still ring in my ears.
The neon sign with “Manufacturing”
that glows as I approach in morning twilight
speaks of the work of hands,
and not just any human’s hands
but my own.
I’m now a member of the proletariat
I joined with youthful zeal and zest.
I’ll try to show to one and all
and mostly to myself
that I’m a healthy and young plant
transplanted into different soil
with all the energy I need to live
and grow in this new climate.
I’ve read Franko and Kotsiubynsky
I understand the working class
I’m almost something of a socialist—
ready to test the principles of theory
against the living practice of a job.

I can’t yet master the machine:
It pulls much faster than I can hold.
“Be steady, not so nervous,” says the foreman.
And intercedes for me with the bosses: “Give her another week!”

Slowly, I get the hang of it.
The boys in the shop

pester me with smutty jokes
while the married ladies
pass pornographic toys
from hand to hand, with secret smiles.
I’m married now, but still not skilled
at fending off assailants with a joke or laugh.
I hide, embarrassed, behind the shield
of simplicity, idealism, and pretending
not to understand the foreign language.
I try to bury my own small world
deep within the confines of my heart.
But I already understand
that bridges across chasms are not alike
some are made of steel and stand quite firm
but others can be made of rope
they sway and wobble in the wind
and yet they carry Himalayan mountaineers
safely across gorges and roaring streams.
The jokes, no matter how lewd,
the smiles, warm and sincere,
a hand outstretched in friendship,
the tears of my emotions—
these are the ropes of mountain bridges
that span the chasms of class and nation
over the turbulent rivers of language
spanning the gap from humanity to the human.

I am friends with the workers.
But here, in jeans and checkered shirt
working from dawn to dusk beside us,
covered in sweat and grime,
is the manufacturer, the owner.
He lunches with us, coke and sandwich,
smashing the old stereotype
of an imagined capitalist.
He knows us all by name

and he’s the last to leave at night.
He doesn’t mind the workers’ jokes
And even listens to their complaints.
But everyone calls him Mister Rosen,
he’s not just Peter to anyone
and his skin is tanned like no one else’s.
He spent January down south
vacationing in the Bahamas.

2. Pursuit of happiness

The neighbor’s lilacs are full bloom
This girl, who never asked for favors
from no one, nowhere—obstinate and proud—
now meekly asks the miser to relent:
Sell me a handful of that heady scent!
And now, supremely proud, she carries
Lilacs for her beloved, and she, like they,
all blooming, young, and full of joy.

A lilac grows in our own garden
Cared for by the wife’s own hands
that it may prosper, grow, and blossom
even in rocky, sunless soil.
Year after year on the kitchen table
May comes with blooms and heady scent,
A scent that still lingers in the room
Even after the flowers have wilted in their vase,
a scent that fills both home and soul
like music playing in the great outdoors.

The lilac blooms. Now it’s the children’s hands
instructed by their mother’s love
that bring the heady scent into the home,
bouquets of purple fantasy in flowers.

That scent, like oxygen for the soul,
fills me with strength like a fresh transfusion.
The lilac blooms, its May forever in my heart.

3. Plain living and high thinking

On the way to work each day I see
Students loaded down with books.
I secretly read the titles.
There's Freud and Darwin, Shakespeare too—
a wealth of unfamiliar subjects brings
a longing that will not be stopped.
These subway-riding students can't imagine
the burning passion that engulfs
the young mother with an infant on her lap
her eyes aglow with sorrow and envy.

But here, her father's hands hold out
the keys, like magic, that will unlock
the padlocks on the gates of education.
The universe of possibilities expands,
the heart fills up with limitless expanse
as for a climber in the mountains
where every higher peak gives
a new perspective in the thinner air
and the resigned thrill of new discovery.

I swap the mundane joys of daily life
for the freedom to fly above the clouds
I now abandon lazy sweet surrender
for the rigid discipline of intellect.
The time that girlfriends from my youth
devote to preparations, thinking in detail
about their gowns, their shoes, and hairdos—
they're planning for the ball they'll all attend—
I'm running with a satchel full of books

in a plain skirt and inexpensive blouse
to catch the uninviting subway in the dark
to make my evening classes in good time.

But there are sacrifices I won't make,
Some things are worthier than life itself
than all the wealth of thought contained in books.
I have a well from which I always draw
the healing waters of emotions, passions:
from this great stream of human warmth and joy
I draw the strength to live life and to grow.

I'm busy raising my own sons
and this is not just motherhood's great joy,
it is a laboratory of real life
a second university—right at home.
Observantly, I watch the child grow,
expanding his horizons day by day—
an infant yesterday in diapers
now holds his head, stands on two feet
and forms the sounds of his first words
and now he's asking his first questions
of cosmic implications. He does not yet know
that answers to these queries don't exist.
With silent pride I watch and hear
the small philosopher, all knees and shorts:
this little person, through the ages
trying to catch eternity in his hands
is only man, who carries God within

The Third Discovery of America

1. A Ballad about a Silver Key

In a ditch, barely visible to the eye,
as if grown over by the land itself,
blackened by time, maybe even rusted

there lay a magic key, untouched.
They passed it with disinterest:
some had much better keys themselves,
the others wondered: what could it unlock?
If only it had a diamond to help it shine
or if in gold it could reflect the sun!

So I picked up this old black key
and now at home I sit at night
and brush it down, I clean it up
slowly and patiently, with loving care.
Beneath my brush, after another wiping,
the shine of silver slowly comes to light
an unexpected joy—a silver key.

Excited, nervously I take this key
and with a slow, uncertain gesture
I put it in the opening of the padlock
of a gigantic trunk, in which
are treasures that were heretofore forbidden:
Chaucer and Milton, Wordsworth and Byron.

And then in a greedy trance
like an agitated rich miser
I run to the next trunk.
The world's pirates have deposited
here in an eternal present
the world's timeless treasures:
Plutarch, Confucius, and Voltaire
stand side by side in the basement
like barrels of wine in a cellar—
I'm drunk, I'm drunk, I'm drunk ...

I'm not used to drinking so much
I must come up for air and sunlight.

But the silver key hangs on my neck
my newfound magic talisman.
It’s a memento: in my cellar
stand rows of cognac, Armagnac
Burgundian wine, champagne, and port
and pinot-chardonnay, sauterne, cab-franc.
This will need a careful taster’s regimen,
not the mindless indulgence of a drunk.

Each time I descend to the cellar
fate holds out a surprise for me.
I go down and get frightened: what’s this?
Has a thief broken in to the trunk?
With his own key he turns the lock
and he’s just as drunk as I am.
A co-owner, a friend, and a drunkard!
There’s a whole company of us now,
each with a key to these treasures
that cannot be stolen or sold.
We all descend to the cellar
each of us to drink alone
then drunk we gather together
and sing ecstatic drinking songs.

2. Moratorium

Today the stadium is repurposed
for an unfamiliar event:
they’ve called a public demonstration
a moratorium against the war.
Here they come, the student-activists,
the working staff and the professors—
the whole university community.
Here they come, publicly to meet
in an unstructured open forum
to talk about the problems of the day

the open wounds, social despair.
Here they come, unexpectedly stirred
to make their views well known to others
to stand up and be counted
among the ranks of dissidents.

Here there's no waiting for directives
from those on high, no following the masses—
there's only consciousness of being at the core
within a liberal nation's public conscience.
In this healthy, fertilized womb
in pregnant contemplation
after a nine-month gestation
and only after painful labor
perhaps an idea will be born.
Like a ball of wet snow
that rolls down a hill to the valley
and grows larger and larger
and stronger and faster,
this daring initiative, this idea
articulated at the right time,
can give the required push
to an avalanche of public action.

Tomorrow, perhaps, the papers will condemn
this action of ours, this seeming heresy,
a month later there will be a flood
of resolutions flowing across the country
and within a year this heresy of ours
will be a plank in party platforms.

The path of democratic change
is hard, complex and slow;
it's not a sudden burst of exaltation
nor heroism on a single day;
it's not the stuff of patriotic speeches

or public proclamation of one’s faith.
What’s needed here is civic courage
to swim against the public’s favored tide;
despite the trials of gray, fruitless workdays
to stand up for the dignity of yourself and others
and for the right to have a difference of ideas—
not just your own, but those against you, too.

The tree of liberty they say
must yet be watered with blood.
But these romantics fail to add
that freedom’s tree will not survive
without the daily watering it gets
in bitter sweat from stubborn activists.

It’s a different sport in the stadium today
and yesterday’s passive observer
silently takes in this strange spectacle.
I’ve come down from the stands
today I’m on the pitch, in the arena
taking part in this unusual sport.

3. Synthesis

Librarian, professor of law
and director of the largest law library in the world,
today my friend Morris
is at the pinnacle of his career.

Sipping wine in the faculty club
Morris says: “You know,
I just got a letter yesterday,
a temptation: to establish
a library research center
at a new university
on the outskirts of Jerusalem…”

“For this you would consider
leaving your security, your well-being, your career?
The books you’re planning.
The monographs already on the way?”

“For my position here,” says Morris,
“there is an endless line of candidates…
But over there volunteers are scarce
and I have no competitors…”
He smiles: “They said I would build there
an arsenal of liberal thought
to hold the equilibrium
between our totalitarian factions…
There is need and funds are available,
but the plan cannot be realized
unless real live people come forward,
men with heart and soul
who would be willing to bring in as a sacrifice
the experience they have gained in the wide world…”

Says Morris: “I’ve observed at first hand
how difficult it is to build a new society
on foundations that are thousands of years old.
Healthy hands and healthy thought are needed,
the knowledge and intellect of the best specialists available…”

“You will go? You’ve decided already?
But your roots are right here, in New York.
Is this not, after all, your own country?”

“I am a New Yorker all the way back to my grandfather
and I’m sure to come back here eventually
to live out my old age here in Brooklyn.
But remember, I am a descendant
of that ageless, that ancient culture,

that united us all in diaspora,
that fed infants together with mother’s milk
the dream about the promised land of Canaan.
I have a debt to history on my shoulders
and I have to pay it back with honor.”

Sipping wine in the faculty club
we sat long into the hours of night
and I saw through the windows
in the city’s darkness
a mirage born along the Dnipro—
the ageless gold-covered cupolas
of my own far-away Jerusalem.

Translated by Maxim Tarnawsky and Marta Tarnawsky

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Poems from the Festival of Contemporary Ukrainian Poetry

Alex Averbuch, organizer and editor

July-August 2020 [Online event]

Фестиваль сучасної української поезії
Contemporary Ukrainian Poetry Festival

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Event sponsor
Danylo Husar Struk Programme in Ukrainian Literature of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies

Introduction

This section of the journal is devoted to a first-of-its-kind event: an online festival of contemporary Ukrainian poetry that was part of a series of literary events I organized with support from the Danylo Husar Struk Programme in Ukrainian Literature of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta. The Struk programme regularly hosts readings by contemporary Ukrainian authors, giving scholars and the public a chance to engage with the latest trends and names in Ukrainian literature. They are meant to show that literature should not be restricted to university classrooms but needs to be seen and heard by a wider appreciative audience.

The festival ran for eight weeks on Zoom through July-August 2020 and showcased sixteen contemporary Ukrainian poets. This issue of the journal includes translations of some of the poetry presented at the festival, now available for English-speaking readers and researchers.

The idea of organizing a two-month, weekly, online festival arose after the sudden proclamation of the lockdown and other restrictions in March 2020. This unexpected and unprecedented experience changed our attitude to each other. It marked the beginning of a period of anxiety, insecurity, and dread of physical closeness, yet it also prompted a search for new means and venues of communication.

A sense of despair associated with the pandemic drove me to seek tools to help adjust to the newly fragmented, isolated reality. The solution was language—the thing that unites us with others. It occurred to me that poetry was this all-uniting, all-accommodating, all-forgiving language that could express the anxieties, losses, and adjustments of the pandemic situation without shame and embarrassment.

A festival of poetry would enable the Ukrainian diaspora and English-speaking readers to encounter Ukrainian literature in a more direct way; to watch, listen, and pose questions to poets with whom few in the Ukrainian diaspora could have interacted, even in pre-pandemic times. This awkward, untimely pandemic could be an excuse to organize a large literary event outside Ukraine.

Such a large festival, with sixteen contemporary poets, would have been very difficult to organize as an in-person event—it would be almost impossible to bring so many poets to North America. Ironically, the pandemic offered an opportunity to establish something otherwise unimaginable —a real (though virtual), viable poetic dialogue between the Ukrainian community in North America and poets in Ukraine (and beyond its borders).

The Danylo Husar Struk Programme supported this initiative, and the Festival of Contemporary Ukrainian Poetry took place in the summer of 2020. Recordings of the sessions are available on the Programme's website for those who didn't attend and for those who teach Ukrainian literature in schools and universities, both in Ukraine and abroad. These same goals are further promoted by now publishing translations of some of this poetry.

Selecting whom to invite to take part in the festival was challenging, but from the beginning I was guided by a basic principle. There seemed to be no point in further canonizing those who have already been canonized. I wanted to give the audience a more panoramic view of contemporary Ukrainian poetry, to include both well-known and lesser-known poets; poets who live in Ukraine and outside it; and poets who do not write solely in Ukrainian. I wanted to highlight the multicultural and multilinguistic richness of Ukraine and its literature. This includes Ukraine's Russophone literature, which has often been the subject of politicized debate. I realize this is a very sensitive topic. But, excluding literature written in Russian,

Tatar, Yiddish, or in other minority languages would diminish the richness of Ukraine's culture and echo the exclusions and banishments of previous epochs. Today, many Russian-speaking poets of Ukraine are beginning to write in Ukrainian, whether due to internal needs or the crisis in relations with the Russian language and Russia. Their choices should be a matter of discussion and debate in the context of mutual understanding and respect.

A project like this, I believe, brings poets, translators, readers and scholars together, making it possible to rethink, in a dialogue, what was previously unspeakable, to translate it both literally, in poetry, from one language to another, and symbolically—from one's own internal language, with its truths and lies, to that of someone else. As such, this festival and the translations that were born with it are decidedly comparative and topical, as they foster an appreciation for otherness and develop curiosity, critical thinking, cross-cultural and trans-epochal understanding. And all this is possible because—*only* because—poetry has the power to reconcile.

Alex Averbuch

Дарина Гладун

[ІНСТИТУТ ПЕРЕГЛЯДУ ІСТОРІЇ]

1.

«[redacted] ЗАВОД» спеціалізується на виробництві [будь-яке слово]
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза]

[будь-яке слово] 1762 рік[пауза]

[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза]
почав виробництво пароплавів
[будь-яка фраза]
виробництво паротягів
[будь-яка фраза]
залізничних мостів
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза]

з 1963 року на заводі випускають дитячі коляски
з 1965 — автомобільні запчастини
з 1982 — малогабаритні пральні машини «[redacted]»
[будь-яке слово]
[будь-яка фраза]
у 1998 році було розпочато виробництво міжконтинентальних ракет стратегічного призначення «[redacted]»
у 2006 — серійний випуск ракет комплексу «[redacted]»

у майбутньому завод планує випуск
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза]
а також

Daryna Gladun

INSTITUTE FOR HISTORICAL REVIEW

1.

[redacted] FACTORY specializes in the production of [any word]
[any phrase]
[any phrase]

[any word] the year 1762 [pause]

[any phrase]
[any phrase]
[any phrase]
began manufacturing steamers
[any phrase]
manufacturing locomotives
[any phrase]
railway bridges
[any phrase]
[any phrase]
[any phrase]

from 1963 at the factory baby carriages were made
from 1965 automobile parts
from 1982 compact “[redacted]” washing-machines
[any word]
[any phrase]
in 1998 “[redacted]” intercontinental strategic missiles began production
in 2006 mass production of the “[redacted]” missiles started
in the future the factory plans to produce
[any phrase]

[any phrase]
[any phrase]
and also

2.

викрадачі історії
щороку змінювали по слову
на одну сторінку підручника
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза]
по чотири слова на сторінку конституції
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза]
заснували інститут перегляду фактів і фальсифікацій
кілька десятків видань періодики (зокрема, літературні журнали «[redacted]», «[redacted]», газети «[redacted]», «[redacted]» тощо)
творчі спілки
і
один телеканал
який у час протестів транслює балет «Лебедине озеро»
[будь-яка фраза] [будь-яке слово] ідеологічні важелі впливу
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза] заміщення
історії [redacted] історією [redacted] а далі — [redacted]
[будь-яке слово] проте
і досі згадуючи про ХХ століття говоримо про
проекти іноземних політичних діячів впроваджені на території держави
також говоримо про будівництво БАМу
і підняття цілини (хоча [redacted] не була до неї причетна безпосередньо)
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яке слово]

[будь-яка фраза]

репродукуємо спотворені спогади

[будь-яке слово]

передруковуємо сфальсифіковані факти про кількість жертв Голокосту Голодомору Сталінських репресій

[будь-яка фраза]

[будь-яка фраза]

[будь-яка фраза]

діячі культури встають перед кінопоказом на знак протесту проти масових арештів

2.

every year history robbers
change a word on every
page of the textbooks
[any phrase]
[any phrase]
[any phrase]
four words on a page in the constitution
[any phrase]
[any phrase]
[any phrase]
they established the institute for the review of facts and falsification
a few dozen periodicals (particularly, the literary journals “[redacted]”, “[redacted]”, the newspapers “[redacted]”, “[redacted]” etc.)
unions of artists
and
a TV channel
which broadcasts the ballet “Swan Lake” during protests
[any phrase] [any word] ideological gears of influence
[any phrase]
[any phrase]
[any phrase] substitution of
the history of [redacted] with the history of [redacted] and later [redacted]
[any word] however
still speaking of the twentieth century we talk about
the projects of foreign politicians were implemented on state territory
we also talk about the construction of the Baikal-Amur Mainline
and upturning virgin soil (although [redacted] was not directly involved in it)
[any phrase]

[any word]
[any phrase]
reproduce distorted memories
[any word]
reprint falsified facts about the number of victims of the Holocaust the Holodomor the Stalinist repressions
[any phrase]
[any phrase]
[any phrase]
workers within the arts stand up before a film screening to protest the mass arrests

[будь-яка фраза]
мітингують проти побиття студентів
[будь-яка фраза]
виступають проти державних злочинів
[будь-яка фраза]
згідно з секретною директивою згадуємо їх лише як зрадників шпигунів
контрреволюціонерів

3.

[будь-яка жінка]
[будь-який чоловік]
18+
говорять про війну і шлюб
говорять про війну
про війну
говорять про шлюб
[будь-яка жінка]
[будь-який чоловік]

[фільм призначений для перегляду особами старшими за]
[будь-який вік]
(я серйозно)
[будь-який вік]

[смерть
призначена для перегляду
особами старшими за]
[будь-який вік]

[any phrase]

[any phrase]
resist the beating of students
[any phrase]
oppose state crimes
[any phrase]
in accordance with a secret directive we only mention them as traitors spies
counterrevolutionaries

3.

[any woman]
[any man]
18+
talk about war and marriage
talk about war
about war
talk about marriage
[any woman]
[any man]

[this film is intended for people over]
[any age]
(I’m serious)
[any age]

[death is
intended for
people over]
[any age]

або

[перегляд смерті дозволений лише за згоди дорослих]
починає вірити в бога
[будь-яка жінка]
[будь-який чоловік]

вирішують де охрестити новонароджену доньку
[будь-яке слово]
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза]
за два роки після підписання декларації про незалежність
отримують свідоцтво про народження дитини старого зразка
зі старим гербом
зі старою назвою території

війну за право на нову ідентичність програли
[будь-яка жінка]
[будь-який чоловік]
не змінюють паспорти до 1995 року
[redacted]
[будь-яке слово]
[будь-яка фраза]
[будь-яка фраза]

4.

дефіцит перевіреної інформації
щодо збройних конфліктів
призводить до

[будь-яка репліка]
[будь-яка репліка]
[будь-яка я]
[будь-яка репліка]
викривлення сприйняття подій
та важливості внеску окремих людей
[будь-яка репліка]

or

[watching death is allowed only with adult consent]
starts believing in god
[any woman]
[any man]

decide where to baptize their newborn daughter
[any word]
[any phrase]
[any phrase]
two years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence
they receive an old-style birth certificate
with the old seal
with the old name of the territory

the war for a new identity was lost by
[any woman]
[any man]
didn’t change passports until 1995
[redacted]
[any word]
[any phrase]
[any phrase]

4.

lack of verified information
about armed conflicts
leads to
[any remark]

[any remark]
[any I]
[any remark]
distortion of our perception of events
and the importance of the contribution of certain individuals
[any remark]

так-званий інформаційний шум
[будь-яка репліка]
з метою маніпуляції думкою широких верств населення
[будь-яка репліка]
мілітаризація поза зоною бойових дій
[будь-яка репліка]
пошук ворога у будь-кому хто відрізняється від
[будь-яка репліка]
[будь-яка репліка]
[будь-яка репліка]

даний текст має також просвітницьку місію
ознайомити читача з максимально об’єктивною
біографією [ім’я прізвище]
[будь-яка фраза]
[ім’я прізвище] народився
[ім’я прізвище] помер
[будь-яка репліка]
у містечку [redacted]
[будь-яка репліка]
[redacted]
[будь-яка репліка]
[redacted]
так само [redacted]
[будь-яка репліка]
[будь-яка репліка]
[будь-яка репліка]

брак перевіреної інформації
спотворює сприйняття дійсності

the so-called information noise
[any remark]
aiming to manipulate the opinion of the masses
[any remark]
militarization beyond the conflict zone
[any remark]
seeing an enemy in anyone who differs from
[any remark]
[any remark]
[any remark]

this text also has an educational mission
to acquaint the reader with the most objective
biography of [name surname]
[any phrase]
[name surname] was born
[name surname] died
[any remark]
in the town [redacted]
[any remark]
[redacted]
[any remark]
[redacted]
also [redacted]
[any remark]
[any remark]
[any remark]

lack of verified information
distorts the perception of reality

Translated by John Hennessy and Ostap Kin

Олена Гусейнова

Потяги

Кінозали створені для
потягів,
які на повній швидкості
летять уперед.
В останню хвилину,
коли в залі не лишається нікого,
хто б не заплющив очей,
на екрані з’являється щось інше.
Одного разу котрийсь з них
не втримається і обов’язково
розірве полотно екрана.
Може, це буде європейський експрес,
з вишуканим вагоном-рестораном,
електричка з бруднуватими вікнами,
товарняк?..
Жертв буде менше,
ніж під час авіакатастрофи.
В новинах про це говоритимуть стримано.
Спілка кінематографістів
візьме на себе зобов’язання
піклуватися про родини загиблих
(Безкоштовні квитки на прем’єрні покази
їм будуть ґарантовані).
Жоден кінотеатр не закриють.
Комусь пощастить зберігати
шматки скла і клапті розірваного
екрана...
Чекаю перед афішею,
поки ти остаточно
впевнишся,
що
в цьому фільмі

не буде
жодного потяга.

Olena Huseinova

Trains

Movie theaters are made for
trains
that fly
full speed ahead.
In the final moment,
when there is no one left in the hall,
no one who wouldn’t close their eyes,
something else appears.
Someday, one of them
won’t resist and will inevitably
slash the silver screen.
It might be a European express
with an exquisite dining car,
or an electric train with dirty windows,
or a freight train?..
The casualties would be fewer
than a plane crash.
The news reports will talk about it with restraint.
The film makers’ union
will make a commitment
to take care of the victims’ families
(guaranteed free tickets
to all premiere screenings).
Not one cinema will close.
Someone lucky has the chance
to gather the pieces
of glass and rags from the torn
screen.
I’ll wait in front of the poster,
until you can
confirm:
there will be

no trains
in this film.

Я

Кінематографічність
моя доступна
кожному.
Я не вмію малювати
очі і губи,
як Віра Холодна.
І рухи мої
далекі
від
Джинджер і Фреда.
Через мою
фігуру,
фактурність якої
вельми сумнівна,
не проглядає
нічого,
що би згодилось для
крупного плану.
Жодна камера не зупиниться
перед
обличчям.
Ніхто не схоче
витрачати на мене кіноплівку.
І тільки коли мене вже
не буде,
голос стихне,
тіло
позбавиться
руху,
вже не перебігатиме
з кадру в кадр,
моя кіношність
загусне,
як вино

в підвалах великих,
розмальованих
червоним і жовтим,
бессарабських будинків.
Її нарешті можна буде
скуштувати.
Тільки обережно
частуйтеся.
Чайною ложкою.

I

My cinematics
could be afforded
by anyone.
I hardly know how to make
up my eyes and lips
like Vira Kholodna.
And my movements
so distant
from
Ginger and Fred’s.
As for my figure—
the texture of which
is rather uncertain—
it’s only vaguely visible.
Not anything
that would attract
a close-up.
No cameras will stop
before
my face.
No one will waste
film on me.
And only when I’m
gone,
my voice
will fade away,
my body
will stop
moving,
no longer will it
flit
frame by frame.
My lens appeal
will thicken

like wine
in the deep cellars
of Bessarabian houses,
painted yellow and red.
At last you can
taste it.
Treat yourself
carefully.
Use a teaspoon.

Ножиці

Коли лезо звичайних ножиць,
куплених вчора
у відділі канцелярських
товарів,
виблискує
в сонячних променях,
і навіть коли воно не виблискує,
і навіть коли ножиці
старші за мене,
іржаві,
з великим,
як ґудзик
на зимовому пальті,
цвяхом
посередині,
боюсь,
що не витримаю спокуси.
Що візьму ножиці
впевнено — правою рукою.
І відріжу коси,
навіть не дивлячись.

Scissors

When the blade of the ordinary scissors
that I bought yesterday
at the Stationery
sparkles in the sun,
and even when it doesn’t sparkle,
and even when the scissors
are older than me,
rusty,
and hold a big
rivet
in the middle,
like a button
on a winter coat,
I fear
I won’t withstand the temptation:
I’ll hold the scissors confidently
with my right hand and cut
all my hair at once
without even looking.

Translated by Khrystia Leshchuk and Grace Mahoney

Ія Ківа

МАРУСЯ

Марії Коваль

а сестра Марія помирала довго
схудла на нитку
аби ввійти крізь вушко голки
до Царства Небесного

лікарі розрізали бліде полотно її тіла
і руками розводили
іржа та болото
на поживу не залишили нам нічого
так і зшили по клаптиках
мов зіпсовану ляльку

коли морфій морфея засліплював очі
вона бачила як Асканія-Нова
колисає в обіймах її дитинство
запирає в легенях сонце пречисте
і кладе їм з сестрою вінки на голови

степ заповнював горло її
степ стишував учвал її серця
степ висушував вільгу її життя

відійшла на Різдво Богородиці
під великі християнські свята
люди завжди помирають страшно
приймаючи муки за радість життя

пішла по воду аж на самий Сиваш
як казали селяни у них на Херсонщині

з того часу жодна дівчинка в її родині
не буває ані гіркою ані бажаною ані безтурботною
хоч напровесні люди завжди пускають човники паперові
і вигукують радуйся Маріє благодаті повна

так вона знає що на землі все ще опираються
метастазам болю

Iya Kiva

MARUSIA

for Maria Koval

Sister Maria was dying for a long time
she grew as thin as a thread
so that she could pass through the eye of a needle
into the Kingdom of Heaven

the doctors cut apart the pale canvas of her body
and shrugged their shoulders
rust and mud
leaving no sustenance for us
they stitched together the pieces
like a broken doll

when Morpheus's morphine blinded her
she saw how Askania-Nova
rocked her childhood in an embrace
filling her lungs with blessed sunshine
and crowning her and her sister with wreaths

the steppe filled her throat
the steppe quieted the gallop in her heart
the steppe dried the sweat of her life

she died on the nativity of the Virgin Mary
on great Christian holidays
people always die terrible deaths
accepting tortures for the joy of living

she walked far for water, all the way to Syvash
so the villagers in Kherson said

from that time on every girl in her family
isn’t bitter isn’t desired isn’t carefree
even though in spring people always sail paper boats
and shout out rejoice Mary full of grace

so she knows that on earth everything resists the
metastasis of pain

мати тримає у жмені п’ять дорослих синів
щоби кинути насінини у великому місті
землю у їхньому селі прокляли місцеві християни
з того часу тут родиться лише каміння

і ґрунт перекочує в роті їхні імена
Павло Петро Михайло Іван та Яків
з очима янгольськими як в їхнього батька
з характером бісовим як в їхньої матері

віддам першим Петра каже
бо немає на світі випробування
яке б не подужала брила

і Петро стає залізничником
визначає шляхи та поєднує долі
адамовими сльозами втішає вигнанців
дає соломонові поради і позичає гроші
і звісно ж одного дня попадається на контрабанді

віддам другим Павла каже
бо немає меншого між людей
смиренність заводить далі за будь-який потяг

і Павло мріє стати священиком
студіює Старий та Новий Заповіти
сипле цитатами як мідяками з кишень
снідає з жебраками і вечеряє з хвойдами
його ніхто не полишає ображеним
бо любов ніколи нічого не коштує

а хто буде годувати родину чує він голос згори
а хто витягатиме старшого брата з в’язниці

нема ради на одкровення з нічного кошмару
і Павло стає рекетиром що не б’є не вбиває
лише самими розмовами доводить до сказу

the mother holds her five grown sons in her hand
so that she can scatter them like seeds in the big city
the earth in their village was cursed by local Christians
from that time only stones grow there

and the ground rolls their names around its mouth
Paul Peter Michael John and Jacob
with angelic eyes like their father’s
with a devilish personality like their mother’s

first, I’ll give away Peter, she says
because there isn’t an obstacle in the world
which a boulder can’t overcome

and Peter becomes a railroad worker
plans the routes and connects fates
comforts exiles with Adam’s tears
gives them advice like Solomon and lends money
and of course one day he is caught with contraband

second, I’ll give away Paul, she says
because there isn’t anyone more humble among people
humility will take you further than any train

and Paul dreams of becoming a priest
studies the Old and New Testaments
sprinkles quotes like copper coins from pockets
eats breakfast with beggars and dines with whores
is never offended by anyone
because love never costs a thing

but who will feed the family he hears a voice from above
but who will bail the older brother out from prison

there is no hope for revelation in his nightmares
and Paul becomes a racketeer who doesn’t beat or kill
drives people insane with only his words

віддам третім Михайла каже
він завжди лупцював сусідських дітей
і робив зброю навіть з пателень та битих горщиків

і Михайло займається боксом як навіжений
щовечора приносить біль та синці як зарплату
перетворює живе на мертве мов кров на воду
а як приходить війна іде до добровольчого батальйону
і гине в людському котлі безіменною кісткою

за свідченнями рідних
він завжди тримав при собі кулю кольору хакі
з тією дитячою іграшкою його і ховали
у правій руці як на всіх прижиттєвих світлинах

віддам четвертим Івана каже
бо Господь наш милостивий
з таким ім’ям неможливо заподіяти собі шкоди

Іван добре вчиться і сумлінно працює
гребує шкідливими звичками і братовими ничками
і навіть у хлопців з заводу викликає нудоту
одружується з ткалею-кралею з сусідньої фабрики
народжує трійко дітей щоб усе як годиться
і висить у рамочці на дошці пошани
живим мерцем соціалістичної революції

як пісок розвіюється він степом чужинським
і сходить ковилою дівчат що пішли подобою в жінку
нема тому роду переводу як то кажуть розумні люди

а Якова не віддам шепоче
він ще із сиру та молока
як візьмете його забирайте дім і всі лахи
а що народить він дванадцятеро синів
то ви ще не написали цієї історії

third, I’ll give away Michael, she says
he always thrashed the neighbor’s children
and even made weapons from pans and broken pots

and Michael boxes like a madman
brings pain and bruises every evening like wages
he turns the living into the dead like blood into water
and when the war begins he joins a volunteer battalion
and dies in a human cauldron of nameless bones

according to relatives
he always carried a khaki-colored bullet with him
they buried him with that children’s toy in his right hand
the way he always appeared in photos

fourth, I will give away John, she says
because our Lord is merciful
with that name it’s impossible to hurt yourself

John is a good student and works hard
avoids harmful habits and brotherly stashes
even the boys from the factory grow tired of him
marries a beautiful weaver from the neighboring factory
begets three children so that everything is as it should be
and he hangs in a frame on the board of honor
as the living dead of the socialist revolution

like sand he is sown over the foreign steppe
and germinates feather grass daughters that resemble his wife
so the tribe never dies out as the wise ones say

but I won’t give Jacob away, she whispers
he is still just cheese and milk
if you take him, take the house and all its contents
he will beget twelve sons,

but you haven’t written that story yet

можна було б назвати це старістю
якби не відбитки на люстерку
цей багаторазовий офортний друк

кожного дня незнайоме зображення
оздоблене родимками і ластовинням
позиченими в інших культур

хлопчик чи дівчинка
батько чи мати
вилітають з вологих очей
пожовклими фотографіями

після чергової трагедії
ми лоскочемо вітер паперовими крилами
як українські бусли

подовгу лежимо в урвищах
катаючи солоні грудки землі
в ротах зашитих нитками болю

годуємо гіркі води історії
підземним молоком замовчування

ось метро їздить моїми судинами
рятуючи вигуки пасажирів
не проявлених у плівці часу

схлипи заліза б’ються о горло
побрязкуючи між зубами
крихкими їхніми пломбами

you could call this old age
if it weren’t for the reflection in the mirror
these repetitive etched prints

every day an unfamiliar image
decorated with moles and freckles
borrowed from other cultures

a boy or a girl
a father or a mother
flies from the moist eyes
of yellowed photographs

after each tragedy
we tickle the wind with paper wings
like Ukrainian storks

we lie in cliffs for a long time
rolling salty mounds of earth
in mouths sewed together with threads of pain

we feed the bitter water of history
with the underground milk of suppression

so the subway runs along my arteries
preserving the cries of its passengers
not captured on the filmstrip of time

sobs of iron throb against my throat
ricocheting between my teeth’s
fragile fillings

Translated by Olena Jennings

Маріанна Кіяновська

документую
день перший в евакуації
голоду письма не можу уникнути
бо говіння орогенез війна
стан за значенням ороговіти

навіювання благоговіння
хлопчик який зумів з’їсти
стільки морозива поламати
стільки дерев підбити
стільки броньовиків
має ще трохи часу

за правилами іносказань
у день другий в евакуації
моє тіло перестало рости
але серце ще тепле калатає
чай остиглий без цукру
облога водою тверді

ошолудивлене небо з вікна
третього дня десь є сонце
а "Гради" це були такі самосійки
жаро- і морозостійкі

в день четвертий сьогодні
думаю як воно
коли уночі вогні кулі трасуючі
другої світової
і де їх діти

мацерація руйнування клітин

день п’ятий риба і птиця
на базарі піду і куплю я думаю
час і до часу

Marianna Kiyanovska

documenting
the first day of dislocation
can’t get rid of a hunger for writing
fasting, orogeny, war
a condition, by definition, of hardening
tissues cornifying

under a spell of reverence
a boy that could eat
so much ice cream break
so many tree trunks shoot down
so many tanks
still has time

by the logic of allegory
on the second day of dislocation
my body ceases to grow
but my heart is still warm, it pounds
tepid tea, sugarless
terra firma besieged by water

scabby sky in the window
on the third day — a sun somewhere
rocket launchers grow like self-seeding weed
heat and frost resistant

on the fourth day today
I think what it’s like when the night’s
filled with fire, glowing trajectories of tracers
in the second world war
and how far they land

maceration, dissolution of cells
on the fifth day, of fish and foul
I will fetch at the market, I think
time and again

розглядаю у дзеркалі зуби
білі свої списала
той і не той папір
ясна закровоточили
втомлена. шостого дня
перенародження перетворення

собака який підірвався на розтяжці
став мізинцем зламаним і болить
не можу далі усе повторення
усе вмирання про себе людське

а зараз за раз
сьомий день
згідно з написаним

examining my teeth in the mirror
my worn out white
paper I’ve used up for writing
gums bleeding
I’m wiped out, on the sixth day
a rebirth a metamorphosis

a dog that got blown up on a tripwire
turns into a broken pinkie and hurts and hurts
I can’t go on, it’s an eternal return
a dying off of the human form

and now — no… ow
the seventh day
as it has been written

маленька гора приходить до мене на лоно
після війни єдина вціліла
пощастило забігла далеко в ліс
голову накрила руками

того дня було так
пастух прийшов до гори
спинився там коло самої скроні
коло вуха і коло горла
на початку струмка

а пастух це людина зі зброєю
а опришок це пастух без овець
добрий пастирю пастирю добрий

і було так що лишилася тільки зброя
тільки зброя серце земля добрий пастирю
добрий пастирю єдині на всіх

коли опритомнів
із грудей його дерево проросло
пташка вилетіла з дупла
боса простоволоса

і хтось її вбив

маленька гора превелике горе

a small mountain sits on top of my womb
the only one that survived the war in one piece
it got lucky ran deep into the woods
covered its head with its arms

on that day it went like this
a shepherd came to the mountain
stopped by its very temple
by its ear and by its throat
at the mouth of the spring

a shepherd is a man with a weapon
and a rebel — a shepherd with no sheep
good shepherd godly pastor

and so it was that only the weapon remained
only the weapon heart soil kindly shepherd
good shepherd these are the same for all

when he came to
a tree sprang out of his chest
a bird flew out of its hollow
barefoot, with hair loose

and somebody killed it

a small mountain a momentous sorrow

серце щоразу вертається
з місця на місце
від дверей і до сну
прокидається тим
без чого не може жити:
обрієм краєм
часу всередині

післямайбутнє
у власному просторі

рух яблука
із якого не видно
ні дерева ні мене

знаю що яблуко
тільки тому що світло

пляма на негативі
майже кругла
майже жива

heart turns every time
from place to place
from a door to a dream
waking up as what
it can’t live without:
a horizon, an edge
of a time inside

afterfuture
in its own space

a movement of an apple
from which you can see
neither the tree nor me

I know that it’s an apple
only because it’s light

a splotch in the negative
almost round
almost alive

добрий секс це просто твоя робота

краще бути дружиною лота
а не дочкою

цей синець за тиждень позеленіє
фотосинтез це коли біль береться з нічого
жінка одне із важливих джерел білка

тато вмер
і я стала
дуже дитиною

плачу сама замість себе
сміюся сама замість себе
їм сама замість себе
сплю сама замість себе

говорю сама до себе
бавлюся гину говорю

тепер
треба з цим жити

.....

ну а він мені каже що ж є як є
добре що ти вже можеш рости

good sex is simply your job

better to be a wife to Lot
than a daughter

in a week the blue of the bruise will turn green
photosynthesis is when pain grows out of nothing
woman is one of the principal sources of protein

father died
and I became
very much a child

crying for myself
laughing for myself
eating for myself
sleeping for myself

I talk to myself
play perish speak

now
I must live with this

.....

and he says well it is what it is
good thing you're already able to grow

Translated by Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky

Олег Коцарев
Парфумер

найдешевший дезодорант
виявився найкращим —
пофоркав ним як їжаком
під пахвами
став пахнути
як дівчинка оля в метро в 11 класі
і сам у себе закохався

- - -

складаєш пальці бутоном тюльпана
і пишеш
і питаєш
«ну в чому ж сенс життя?»
так ніби вже знаєш
де ми
і як ми сюди потрапили

Боротьба

Школа давно закрилась,
а дехто і далі
уроки прогулює
й навіть збирається
зневажати

тих, хто прогулювати не схоче,
бо можуть знайтись
і такі.

Oleh Kotsarev

Perfumer

the cheapest deodorant
turned out to be the best—
I spritzed it like a hedgehog
under my arms
and started to smell
like that girl olia in the metro in 11th grade
and fell in love with myself

- - -

you fold your fingers into the bud of a tulip
and you write
and ask
“well, what’s the meaning of life?”
as if you already know
where we are
and how we got here

Struggle

School is long closed,
but some people are still
playing hookey
and even planning to

disparage
those who don’t want to
’cause maybe they exist
too.

Класну дошку викинули
на пустир
за
за
за
за-
лізницею,
та є серед нас сентиментальні,
є поміж нас
наполегливі —
таки знайшли її,
щоб рукою непевною
вивести крейдою
«FUCK».

Як гарно все рухається
без причин,
як маріонетки
танцюють,
поперегризавши мотузки,
як і без струму
грають на маракасах
лампочки
національних,
соціальних,
естетичних
і філософських гірлянд!

Остання система,
з якою ще можна боротись —
система каналізації,
та ось ти стоїш і боїшся
бій розпочати,
боїшся підняти кришку —
а раптом
і вона

насправді вже не працює?

The chalkboard was thrown into
the lot
be
be
be
hi
nd
the train tracks
but the sentimental are among us,
among us are
the persistent
who found it
so they could write
in chalk and an uncertain hand
“FUCK.”

Everything moves so nicely
without reason
like marionettes
dancing
after gnawing through their strings,
playing the maracas
that are the currentless
light bulbs of
national,
social,
aesthetic,
and philosophical
garlands!

The last system
that can still be struggled with
is the sewer system,
look, you’re standing and afraid
to start the battle
you’re afraid to lift the lid—

what if
really
it too has stopped working?

Стіл зранку

п’ята ранку
на тлі зеленого парку
майоріє скатертина біла
сміючись і здіймаючи руки
загрожуючи підняти стіл у повітря

на столі вітер гойдає мініатюрну пластмасову
парасольку
мовчки лежить недоїдений мармуровий сир
наче шматок дороги
сонце ранкове впало на сірувату тарілку
білою шинкою
в недопитому
в недобитому
келиху
плаває попіл
імперій? сердець? крил? текстів? цигарок?
а недопалок поряд вдає з себе офіціанта
приховуючи пропалену дірку на скатертині

напівпорожню пляшку накрила холодна обароковлена
свічка
напівповну — метелик темно-м’ясного кольору
виделки розкидано ніби мечі після бою
поки ніхто їх іще не зібрав…
хоч зовсім скоро надійде археолог
та поки все на своїх місцях
усерйоз рухається тільки вода в отому фонтані
пролітаючи веселку малу
прикриваючи не дуже помітну скульптуру вдалині
ніби зрізаючи лезом Оккама
і ще людина
у вікні жовтого дому
з порцеляновими очима

яка пише:

«Восьма ранку.
Повільно летить із фонтану вода.
Повільніше, ніж таксі повзе,
В якому з тобою ми їдемо,
Задоволена кам’яна трояндо!»

The Table In Morning

five a.m.
against the background of the green park
a white tablecloth flutters
laughing and raising its hands
threatening to lift the table into the air

the wind rocks a miniature plastic umbrella on the table
the marble cheese sits quietly, untouched
like a piece of road
the morning sun fell on a grayish plate
as white ham
in an undrunk
unfinished
goblet
float ashes
of empires? hearts? wings? texts? cigarettes?
the butt nearby looks like a waiter
covering a burn hole in the tablecloth

a cold, rococo-ed candle tops a half-empty bottle
half-full—a butterfly a dark, meaty color
forks scattered like swords after battle
when no one has yet gathered them…
very soon an archeologist will find them
but for now everything's in its place
seriously only the water in that fountain moves
flying in a small rainbow
obscuring a hard-to-see sculpture in the distance
as if cutting with Occam's razor
there's also a person
in the window of a yellow building
with porcelain eyes
who writes

“Eight a.m.
Water streams slowly from the fountain.
More slowly than the taxi
we’re riding in crawls.
You happy stone rose!”

тільки ні восьмої ранку
ні таксі немає
як і кам’яної троянди
є тільки вода що повільно падає
зрізаючи статую
забутого героя сучасного мистецтва

only it’s not eight a.m.
and there’s no taxi
or stone rose
there’s only the water falling slowly
cutting the statue
by a forgotten hero of contemporary art

Translated by Ali Kinsella

Вано Крюґер

Δέντρα

Поліні Лавровій

я розумію, навіщо шампанське і вишні…
проте чому канделябр в кабінеті…?
цей свідок занадто багатьох вже тіней…
проте вогонь на свічах — це нігті на пальцях —
це вогняні чоловічки в очах

зебра вночі — згорнуті промені сонця —
риски чорним по білому
зебра вдень — згорнута темрява ночі —
риски сонцем по чорному

пам’ятаю
вишню в гетьманському саду,
що оббирав я із другом,
спиляли
а
дерево того, **хто взяв кору собі, наче шкіру**
зеленіє і досі

Váno Krueger

Δέντρα

for Paulina Lavrova

the champagne and cherries I get,
but why’s there a candelabra in your room?
this witness to already too many shadows…
the flames on candles are nails on fingers—
fiery men in one’s eyes

a zebra at night is the furled rays of the sun
stripes of black on white
a zebra in day is the furled darkness of night
stripes of sun on black

I remember
the cherry tree in the Hetman’s orchard
that a friend and I picked clean
was cut down
but
the tree of **he who took the bark as his skin**
still grows green

Рельєфи אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל

Михайлу Григорову

сонце світить золотими
і жовтими променями
יהוה יהוה יהוה
панцер мокриці
крутись наймудріша з комах крутись
в безодні колодязя неба
ніхто так не хоче щоб ти розгорнулась
як я цього хочу
ніхто так не хоче тебе прочитати —
— сувій твій гірський і небесний —
як я цього хочу
крутись наймудріша з комах крутись
знаєш і свідчиш
день змінює ніч
ніч змінює день
сонце світить золотими
і жовтими променями
місяць — білим і світлим
як кість, з якої все почалося…

руки кедрові татуйовані болем
жуки їх не ранять — бо жили відмерли
багатоніжка оперізує кедрове дерево
шовковим поясом
у неї так багато членників
у неї так багато ніг
у неї так багато очей
вона така довга що коли б
була цим сувоєм, день не настав…
вона така довга, що їй вже немає чого боятися…
кедр розкривається мокрицею
у нього так багато членників

у нього так багато ніг
у нього так багато очей
יהוה יהוה יהוה
сонце світить золотими
і жовтими променями
кедри ростуть щоб втекти від коріння —
позбутися тліну землі!

אֶרֶץ וּשְׁנַאַל Reliefs

for Mykhailo Hryhoriv

the sun shines in golden
and yellow rays
יהוה יהוה יהוה
shell of the woodlouse
curl up, you wisest of bugs, curl up
in the bottomless well of the sky
no one wants you to unfold
as much as I do
no one wants to read you
—your scroll alpine and celestial—
as much as I do
curl up, you wisest of bugs, curl up
you know and bear witness
night becomes day
day becomes night
the sun shines in golden
and yellow rays
the moon in white and silver
like the bone that started it all…

cedar arms tattooed with pain
beetles can’t wound them for the veins have died
the silk belt of a centipede engirdles
the cedar tree
she has so many segments
so many legs
so many eyes
is so long that if she were
this scroll, day wouldn’t come…
so long that she no longer has anything to fear
the cedar unfurls like a woodlouse
he has so many segments

so many legs
so many eyes
יהוה יהוה יהוה
the sun shines in golden
and yellow rays
cedars grow to escape their roots—
get rid of the smolder of earth!

марна справа — бо проклята доля дерев!
хоч і здійняті руки їхні в молінні
німому як крик випаленої щойно землі
кедри не квітнуть… квіти кедрові — не-квіти…
ви помрете і впадете насінням…
в польоті зануритесь в землю…
щоб прорости і здійняти знову руки в молінні!
німому як крик випаленої щойно землі…

…куди ж ти ростеш, квітко боса — кедрова не-квітко…?
…крім землі тебе вже ніхто ніде не чекає…

אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל
рельєфи жони — груди, стегна, живіт…
твій наречений і син
забуває про ямку на верхній губі —
там, де торкнувся вогонь…
забуває, що ідеальна форма —
краплина

it’s pointless—the fate of trees is cursed!
even though their arms are raised in prayer
to the deaf one like the scream of the just scorched earth
cedars don’t flower… cedar flowers are non-flowers…
you will die and fall as seeds
in flight dive into the earth
to grow and again raise your arms in prayer!
to the deaf one like the scream of the just scorched earth

…where are you growing, barefoot flower, cedar non-flower…?
…besides the earth, no one waits for you anywhere…

אָרָץ יִשְׂרָאֵל
reliefs of a woman—breasts, thighs, belly…
your betrothed and son
forgets about the dimple on your upper lip —
where the fire has touched you…
forgets that the ideal form is
a drop

Медитація тибетського лами

— …что касается творца этого мира,
то я с ним довольно коротко знаком.
— Вот как?
— Да-с. Его зовут Григорий Котовский, он живёт в Париже,
и, судя по тому, что мы видим за окнами
вашей замечательной машины,
он продолжает злоупотреблять кокаином.

Виктор Пелевин

Лаврентій Берія, тибетський чернець,
На чолі його — зморшки, мов промені сонця,
Що щедро дарують і світло, й тепло.
Лаврентій Берія, тибетський чернець,
Медитує,
Й у медитації
Бачить шамана традиції бон,
Що гладить шипи на шкірі змії,
Шаман ніжно пестить змію, він гладить її із любов’ю,
Змія відчуває всю ніжність шамана і платить йому
Розумінням.

Лаврентій Берія, тибетський чернець,
Нерухомо сидить,
Й не поворухнуться зморшки
На його обличчі:
Він медитує.
Й у медитації
Бачить, як змії
Сплітаються в пристрасті,
Під не менш пристрастні крики шамана,
Який виголошує слова і молитви.
Змії із крилами, змії окрилені пристрастю,
Змії утворюють кадуцей — жезл посланців,

І відчиняють ворота

Між злом і добром, пеклом і раєм, знанням й незнанням

Під пристрастні звуки молитви шамана.

Meditation of a Tibetan Lama

“But as for the creator of this world,
I am rather briefly acquainted with him.”
“And how’s that?”
“Oh, yes. His name is Grigory Kotovsky and he lives in Paris,
and judging from everything that we can see through the windows of your remarkable automobile, he is still using cocaine.”

Victor Pelevin, *Buddha’s Little Finger*

Lavrentiy Beria, Tibetan monk,
Wrinkles on his forehead like rays of the sun,
That generously give off light and warmth.
Lavrentiy Beria, Tibetan monk,
Meditates,
And in meditation
Sees a shaman of the Bon tradition,
Stroking the barbs on a snake’s skin,
The shaman gently pets the snake, he strokes it with love,
The snake feels all the shaman’s gentleness and pays him with
Understanding.

Lavrentiy Beria, Tibetan monk,
Sits motionless,
And the wrinkles will not move
On his face:
He mediates.
And in meditation
He sees snakes
Entangled in passion,
To the no less passionate shouts of the shaman,

Who is delivering the words and prayers.
Snakes with wings, snakes winged with passion,
The snakes form a caduceus—the staff of messengers,
And open the gates
Between good and evil, heaven and hell, ignorance and knowledge
To the passionate sounds of the shaman’s prayer.

Лаврентій Берія, тибетський чернець,
Медитує,
Й у медитації
Він стоїть перед прямокутним і чорним проваллям —
— воротами пекла —
За спиною кохання,
Чиї очі зав’язані і зв’язані руки.
Лаврентій Берія
Підносить руку із маузером
До потилиці бранки, просто до ямки,
Що підступно сховалась в волоссі.
Маузер ніжно цілує бранку у ямку,
Її тіло здригається і безгучно падає в яму.

Лаврентій Берія, вже лама тибетський,
Ніжністю світяться його зморшки
Лагідно поблискують скельця пенсне
Лаврентій Берія, лама тибетський
Усміхається:
Він
Нарешті
Звільнився.

Lavrentiy Beria, Tibetan monk,
Meditates
And in meditation
He stands before a rectangle and a black chasm—
the gates of hell—
Love is behind him,
Its eyes covered and its hands tied.
Lavrentiy Beria
Lifts his hand with the Mauser
To the captive’s nape, to the dimple
That cunningly hid in her hair.
The Mauser tenderly kisses the captive in her dimple
Her body trembles and noiselessly falls in the pit.

Lavrentiy Beria, now a Tibetan lama,
His wrinkles glow with tenderness
The lenses of his pince-nez glisten delicately
Lavrentiy Beria, Tibetan lama,
Smiles:
He’s
Finally
Free.

Translated by Ali Kinsella

Галина Крук

Вікно можливостей

що ж це за світ такий,
де кожен може видавати себе за когось іншого,
назватися чужим іменем,
вести інстаграм "щасливої людини",
"успішної жінки", яка все встигає
або ніколи не повертається з екзотичних країн,
не ходить до праці, не робить нічого важкого
нічого важливого, крім себе самої
що ж це за світ такий,
де нас вчить жити кожен, кому вдалося сьогодні
вийти сухим із води, опинитися в потрібному місці
обігнати тебе на повороті, доки ти поступався місцем,
давав дорогу слабшому,
- і хто з нас тепер слабак? — підморгує хитро
що ж це за світ такий,
де ніхто ніколи не знає, що з ним трапиться завтра,
де ніяке знання не дає гарантій, що воно навіщось потрібне,
де кожна потреба така ж тимчасова, як і все решта
у напівпорожньому останньому трамваї
троє підпилих чоловіків під тридцять обговорюють новину,
що в місті відкрилося ще одне "вікно життя"
один каже: бог в поміч малоліткам, хоч вони і дури
другий заперечує: всі ми діти господні,
навіть такі придурки, як ти, Вася,
третій хоче вийти на наступній:
пацани, не списуйте все на бога,
одне із них — точно моє, треба вернутися, забрати...
ті не пускають. вирується, плаче.
коли відчиняються одразу всі двері —
значить це кінцева, виходьте, люди...

і ти виходь, що завтра забудеш про свої п'яні пориви,
і я виходжу, що світ мене не хоче більше ловити,
як я не піддаюся, як я не піддаюся

Halyna Kruk

A Window of Possibilities

what kind of world is this,
where anyone can masquerade as someone else,
be called by another name,
post on instragram as “a happy person,”
“a successful woman,” “extremely accomplished,”
always in an exotic place,
never has to go to work or do anything difficult
or important other than for herself,
what kind of world is this,
where we can learn from anyone, able to emerge
dry from the water today, in the right place
overtaking you at that critical moment when you held back,
making way for a weaker person,
and which of us is now weak? — she winks cleverly
what kind of world is this where no one ever knows, what will happen to them tomorrow,
where knowledge is not guaranteed to be of use,
where every need is fleeting, just like everything else
in the last half empty tram car
three drunk men under thirty discuss the news,
that in the city another “window on life” opened
one says: god will help the young, even though they are naive
the second one argues: we are all children of god,
even jerks like you, Vasya,
the third one wants to get off at the next stop:
guys, don’t attribute everything to god
one is certainly mine, we need to return, bring him back...
they restrain him, he breaks free, cries.
when all the doors open at once

it means they are at the last stop, get off, ladies and gentlemen...

and you exit, for tomorrow you'll forget about your drunk impulses,

and I exit, for the world no longer tries to capture me,

I do not surrender, do not surrender

самість

стояла така спека,
що навіть прохолодність у стосунках була як благо
перш ніж відійти, літо вичавлювало з нас останні соки
переплавляло в щось інше, не обов'язково краще
це тіло не викликає в мене більше довіри,
але ніхто мені його не замінить, тіло як тіло
іноді світ обмежується крисами капелюха від сонця,
западиною між грудей, колінами на горизонті
я тебе не бачу, тіло моє, я фокусуюся далі,
де лінія моря ледь заламується по краях,
як закопилені губи, нагадуючи, що земля кругла
є речі, в які треба вірити, навіть якщо сам не досвідчиш:
фізика твердого і порожнистого тіла,
механіка внутрішнього руху вгору, оптика просвітлень.
ще жодного літа ми не прочитали усього списку літератури,
завжди щось виявляється зайвим, застарілим, не смакує.
останній цвіркун літа знаходить у мені першу глибоку зморшку
і там залягає назавжди
високочастотним звуком, від якого нема де сховатись
тіло моє любе, ми пройшли критичну точку,
ми рухаємося в напрямку щораз більшого дискомфорту:
безглузде диско на пляжі, набридливі крики чужих дітей,
колючий пісок під купальником,
море б'ється об заклад,
що ми більше не повернемося сюди ніколи
такими самими ніколи такими самими

the self

there was such a heat wave,
that even the cooling off of relationships was like a blessing
more than moving on, summer squeezed the last juices from us
melted them into something else, not necessarily better
I don’t trust my body anymore,
but nothing will replace it for me, a body is a body
sometimes the world is limited by the rims of a sunhat,
the crevice between breasts, knees on the horizon
I don’t see you, my body, my focus is out into the distance,
where the line of the sea almost breaks at the edges,
like pursed lips, reminding us that the earth is round
there are things, which you have to believe in, even if you have not experienced them:
the physics and hollowness of the body,
the mechanics of an inner movement upward, the optics of enlightenment.
there still has not been a summer when we have read the whole list of literature,
something always seemed unnecessary, too old, not to our liking
the last cricket of summer finds my first wrinkle
and lodges there forever
with a high frequency sound, from which there is nowhere to hide
my dear body, we have passed a critical point,
we are moving in the direction of even greater discomfort:
senseless disco on the beach, endless shouting of someone’s children
prickly sand underneath my swimsuit,
the sea beats and bets

that we won’t ever come back here
the same never the same

сіра зона

того літа, коли в ньому знайшли осине гніздо,
і кожен, кому не лінь, тикав туди палкою і тікав,
батькова стара куртка, повішена на гвіздок
клала йому на плече свій важкий рукав —
підбадьорювала, як могла.

тої осені, коли призахідне сонце підпалило сусідський дім,
і ніхто, крім нього, не побіг гасити, куди вони всі пішли?
він зрозумів, що завалений горизонт подій
не дає йому бачити світло, але воно десь там, де розходяться шви
б'є в одну точку і б'є,

тої зими, коли в здичавілих собачих очах він перестав
виглядати людиною, забув розрізняти ніч і день, збайдужів
до усього, грівся об теплу чужу кров, така ставка
щоб вижити, природа бере гору над горою людей,
знаходив, ховав

тої весни, коли війна закінчилася, відстріляли диких тварин,
розібрали завали, деякі населені пункти перенесли
на порожні нові місця, ніхто не знав, що за один
ходить у батьковій куртці, говорить в садах до вцілілих слив,
і сливи йому відповідають

gray zone

that summer, when we found a hornet’s nest,
and everyone, who wasn’t lazy, poked at it with a stick and ran away,
father’s old coat, hung on a nail
put its heavy sleeve on his shoulder,
encouraging him as much as it could.

that fall when the sun set fire to the neighboring building,
and no one, except him, ran to put it out, where did they all go?
he understood, that the overwhelming events on the horizon
preventing him from seeing the light, where the seams come undone
pounding and pounding at a single point.

that winter, when in the eyes of wild dogs he stopped
looking like a person, he forgot how to differentiate night and day, turned totally apathetic
warmed himself against a stranger’s blood
just to survive, nature took mounds and mounds of people,
found them, hid them

that spring, when the war ended, they shot the rest of the wild animals,
dismantled the mounds, transferred some inhabited sections
to new empty cities, no one knew who
walked in father’s coat, who spoke to the surviving plums in the orchards
and the answers that they gave

Translated by Olena Jennings

Мирослав Лаюк

гарні дерева

коли померла віслава шимборська
мій сусід через паркан
почав виходити в сад і казати:
дерева дерева які ви всі гарні — такі гарні
що неможливо вибрати на котрім із вас вішатися

він звісно не знав хто така шимборська
а якби я йому сказав це ім’я
він би старий точно перепитав:
хто-хто — наталя цімборська?

та вішайся вже нарешті! —
з часом почала кричати йому зла дружина
котра колись позичила у нас п’ять мішків цементу
і досі не віддала
(а ще її покійний батько у війну допомагав фашистам!)

а чоловік відповідав: ці дерева такі гарні
що неможливо вибрати на котрім із них вішатися —
зрештою одного дня повісилася сусідка
на вербі

—

ну добре: я трохи перегнув
не повісилася — померла своєю смертю
але п’ять мішків цементу
так і не віддала

Myroslav Laiuk

pretty trees

when wislawa szymborska died
my neighbor across the fence
started going out into the garden saying
trees trees you’re all very pretty — so pretty
that I can’t tell which one I want to hang myself from

he of course didn’t know who szymborska was
and if I said the name to him
the old man would ask
who now — natalya tsymborska?

just hang yourself already!
his angry wife started saying after a time
she’s the one who borrowed five bags of cement from us
and still hasn’t given them back
(and her late grandfather helped the fascists in the war!)

the husband answered: these trees are so pretty
that I can’t tell which one I want to hang myself from —
then one day his wife hanged herself
from the willow

—

well okay: I exaggerated
she didn’t hang herself — she died of natural causes
but still never gave us
those five bags of cement

зупинка

ця дошка яка тепер чорна
була колись без сумніву білою
на неї сідали сотні людей
на цю структурну частину лавки й автобусної зупинки

на цій засмальцьованій дошці
видряпані матюки
хто і коли тут був
хто в цій місцині блядь
і навіть додані їхні номери телефонів
але головне — це розклад руху
і кому це треба — спитаєш хто в цьому винен

навколо же живуть чисті вихована люди
вони ніколи не запізнюються на автобус
бо точно знають розклад

яблунівський о 7:30 косівський зелений о 7:45
косівський білий о 9:00 верховинський між 8:25 і 8:40
київський коло 9:00 але він може не зупинитися
усі приходять рівно вчасно на зупинку
аби не заходити всередину де завжди загиджено

громада навіть недавно відшліфувала дошку до білизни
але вона знову чорна вона мусить бути чорною
аби білим проступали надписи
аби завжди кожен міг знати розклад руху
то не для місцевих які й так знають
і всередину ніколи не заходять
то для таких як ми
проїжджих приїжджих від’їжджих

котрі сидять усередині цієї загидженої зупинки
і не чують смороду
котрі ловлять дух часу
і не чують смороду

the stop

this board that’s black now
doubtless used to be white
hundreds of people sat on it
on this structural part of the bench and the bus stop

on this greasy board
with swearwords scratched in
who was here and when
who’s the whore in this village
and even their phone numbers
but the main thing is the bus schedule
and to whoever needs it — ask who’s to blame here

clean, well-groomed people still live around here
they’re never late to the bus
because they know the schedule

to yabluniv at 7:30 green to kosiv at 7:45
white to kosiv at 9:00 to verkhovyna between 8:25 and 8:40
to kyiv around 9:00 but it might not stop here
everyone gets to the stop right on time
so they don’t have to go inside where it’s always filthy

the community even washed the boards till they were white recently
but now it’s black again it has to be black
so the signs show through white
so everyone can know the schedule
that’s not for the locals who know anyway
and don’t even go inside the stop
that’s for people like us
passing through settling in setting out

who sit inside the filthy stop

and don’t smell the stench
who get the zeitgeist
and don’t smell its stench

сніг землі і сніг неба

коли померла прабаба корнелія
випав сніг такий що діватися було нікуди
хіба ходити з заплющеними очима

вона стояла над піччю варила бульйон
і щойно згорнулася куряча кров — прабаба упала
а потім пішов сніг

жінки шепталися про те як корнеля виходила надвір
і — сонячно чи хмарно — проклинала погоду
голосно на всі горби

і коли чоловіки до цвинтаря розчистили дорогу
то обернулися назад і зрозуміли
що нічого не розчистили
бо ішов не тільки сніг неба
а й сніг землі

але це таке — буває
головне — казав дід петро її син —
що сніг із того часу не зупинявся —
він кожного дня і кожної ночі йде — а ми й не помічаємо

а я питав: як це не зупинився —
глянь у вікно там же літо
а він відповідав: і нащо ти до школи ходиш?!
нічого ти не розумієш
байстре

ground snow and sky snow

when great grandmother kornelia died
a snow fell that hid everything
like you were walking around with closed eyes

she stood over the stove and made broth
and just when the chicken blood clotted, great
grandmother fell
and then the snow came

the women whispered about how kornelia went outside
and — rain or shine — cursed the weather
loud echoing over the hills

and when the men cleared a path to the cemetery
they looked back and realized
that they hadn’t cleared a thing
because not only sky snow was falling
but also ground snow

but that’s nothing — it happens
the main thing — said old man petro why was her son —
is that the snow hadn’t stopped since that time
it falls every day and every night and we don’t notice it

I asked how it hadn’t stopped
look out the window, it’s summer
and he answered: why do you go to school?
you don’t get anything
bastard

Translated by Anand Dibble

Оксана Луцишина

* * *

молоді тоні моррісон і енджела девіс
крокують (здається) мангеттеном
крокують вперед у щасливіші часи
коли визволять жінок
коли визволять робітників
коли хоч кого-небудь визволять
недарма одна з них вивчає діалектику визволення
а інша питає —
Господи що це за жертва така що це за жертва
коли пам'ятають що ти чорна але забули що ти —
кохана?

це сімдесят четвертий рік
це рік під назвою майже три чверті
це рік коли люди ще не втомлювалися вірити
це рік мого народження у зовсім іншій країні
у тій де енджела каже — хай живе великий ленін
у тій де ніхто не чув про тоні моррісон
де ніхто не уявляє собі цього співу дітей води —
ми зберемося біля ріки, Господи
що плине до Твого престолу

молоді тоні моррісон і енджела девіс
молоді на цій світлині молодші за мене
і хоробріші
світ довкола них теж молодий
як то і буває у еру титанів —
молодий і лютий

сімдесят четвертий — це століття без серпика
це залізний вік це рік крові яка стає іржею
рік іржі яка стає кров'ю

це рік початку часу
який каже мені: а тепер розплющуй очі

Oksana Lutsyshyna

* * *

young toni morrison and angela davis
walk (it seems) across manhattan
walk ahead to happier times
when women are freed
when workers are freed
when at least someone is freed
it isn’t in vain that one of them learns the dialectics of freedom
and the other asks —
Lord what kind of sacrifice is this what kind of sacrifice
when they rememeber that you are black but forget that you are beloved?

It’s ’74
a year that is almost three quarters of the century
a year when people weren’t yet tired of believing
the year of my birth in a whole different country
one in which angela says — let the great lenin live
one in which no one has heard of toni morrison
and no one imagines the songs of the children of the water —
we shall gather at the river, Lord
which flows to Your throne

young toni morrison and angela davis
young in this photo younger than me
and braver
the world around them is also young
the way it often is in the era of titans —
young and cruel

’74 is a century without a sickle

it is an iron age a year of blood which turns into rust
a year of rust which turns into blood
it is the year of the beginning of time
which says to me: and now open your eyes

і ось починаються останні дні наче останні дні
втілення, і ти кажеш — Господи навіть люди можуть повернути ріку —
то невже Ти не Можеш?

починаються останні дні і все виглядає як втрата — сонце
з вікна, кіт на підлозі, віршовані рядки переламані анжамбеманами, спека
зависла над містом якого ти не знаєш
і вже і не взнаєш

треба писати, думаєш, адже незакінченою
залишилася історія про ту жінку із середніх віків
про чуму яку ти носила у собі задовго до цієї чуми
задовго до всього

у тому часі або у тому безчассі жінка танцює
танець-реверс
це як повертатися до витоків власного зору —
рано чи пізно опиняєшся спершу у темряві а тоді у світлі
пронизуєш і пронизуєш чиїсь дерева

* * *

and so the last days begin as if they are the last days
of embodiment, and you say — Lord even people can change
a river's course —
so how is it possible that You can't?

the last days begin and everything appears as a loss — sun
through the window, cat on the floor, lines of the poetry
that are broken
by enjambment, a heat wave
hangs above a city you don't know
and will never know

you need to write, you think, since the story
is unfinished about that woman from the middle ages
about the plague you carried inside too long up to this
plague
too long for everything

in that time or in that timelessness a woman dances
a dance in reverse
that is how you return to the source of your own sight —
sooner or later you'll end up first in darkness and then in
light
that pierces and pierces someone's trees

* * *

...а там далі починається така кімната де нема віршів
а за нею іще одна
повороти, підземні переходи, тунелі
під тунелями і під іншими переходами
і ти знаєш що це теж дорога якою можна іти
яка повзе вниз і вниз
аж поки ти розумієш що тепер ти під не тільки під землею
але і під морем
і ось воно б'є собою десь там на поверхні
десь воно ударяє в пісок у камінь у сушу
десь воно звивається нагорі усіма своїми клітинами
мов міфічний дракон
піднімає голову і сичить

яка мала плита відділяє тебе від нього,
чому вона досі не трісла? скільки
має часу пройти щоб сягнути від цього моря до іншого
до того що замкнуте у півколо континенту,
влите малими затоками
у мокру землю з якої ростуть мангрові дерева?..
це твоя кругосвітня подорож зрізаним колом
меншим за коло землі

...І ось ти приходиш у точку темряви
і нарешті чуєш його, море,
намацуєш вологі стіни і наслухаєш його ваготу —
тут, на такій глибині, немає ніяких хвиль,
але у тріщинку у плиті затікає вода
і рухається до тебе як звук, як світло
як звук, як світло
 як світло

* * *

...and further there is a room where there aren’t any poems
and beyond that there is another room
turns, underground passages, tunnels
below tunnels and below other passages
and you know that this is also a road that you can take
which slopes down and down
until you understand that now you are not only beneath the earth
but also beneath the sea
and its waves crash somewhere on the surface
somewhere the sea strikes sand, stone, and land
somewhere it billows up with every cell
like a mythical dragon
it lifts its head and hisses

what thin slab separates you from it,
why didn’t it crack yet? how much
time does it take for you to go from this sea to another
to the one that is locked in the semicircle of a continent,
poured into small bays
into the wet earth from which mangrove trees grow?..
this is your around the world trip of a sliced-off circle
smaller than the circle of the earth

...And so you arrive at the point of the darkness
and finally you hear it, the sea,
you grope the moist walls and listen to its weight —
here, at this depth, there are no waves,
but through a small crack in the slab water leaks in
and moves to you like sound, like light,
like sound, like light
like light

хто за мене, питаєш
хто за мене? — ось це дерево,
хіба воно може бути проти тебе?
хіба дерева бувають проти людей?

цілий парк дерев
цілий ліс, якщо хочеш — і всі за тебе
кожнісіньке

а кіт? хіба кіт проти тебе?
ні, кіт за тебе
і цей кіт і всі на світі коти
всі — за тебе, всі — твоя армія
струнки, жовтоокі

а боги? твої і чужі — і всі на світі?
хіба їм для тебе щось шкода?
та нічого не шкода, звісно,
вони за тебе,
як би це вони були — проти?

а той учитель що сказав — думка може все?
як його — зараз згадаю — Свамі Вішнудевананда?
він що — проти тебе?
ото став би він витрачати час! звісно,
він за тебе
за тебе

а море? що — думаєш, море проти тебе?
всі його хвилі і камінці і піщинки
видимі і невидимі
всі за тебе, не сумнівайся
щодня і щохвилини
чуєш — море шумить?
це воно каже тобі: я

за тебе
за тебе

* * *

who is on my side, you ask
who is on my side? — this tree here,
as if it could be against you?
as if trees could be against people?

a whole park of trees
a whole forest, you could say — and all are on your side
all of them

and the cat? is the cat against you?
no, the cat is on your side
this cat and all the world’s cats
all — on your side, all — your army
nimble, yellow-eyed

and gods? yours and others — and everyone in the world?
wouldn’t they help you?
of course, they would
they are on your side
how could they be — against you?

and that teacher that said — thoughts are everything?
what’s his name — Swami Vishnudevananda
is he — against you?
why waste your time! of course,
he is on your side
on your side

and the sea? what — you think, the sea is against you?
all its waves and pebbles and beaches
visible and invisible
everything is for you, don’t doubt it
everyday and every minute
do you hear — the sea roars?

it says to you: I
am on your side
on your side

а музика? котра з нот — проти тебе?
котра із мелодій?
Моцарт? репери? піаністи?
Академія Бізантіна? Пол Маккартні?
та ні, ну що ти
всі за тебе
за тебе

і немає нікого проти
і ніколи не буде
а тому люби, люби далі
не бійся

and music? which of the notes are against you?
which of the melodies?
Mozart? rappers? pianists?
The Accademia Bizantina? Paul McCartney?
no, what are you thinking
everyone is on your side
on your side

and there is no one against you
and there will never be
and so love, keep on loving
don’t be afraid

Translated by Olena Jennings

Серго Муштатов

точная вещь революции

ручей — быстрый бинт
покажи это место укола
мочку
через которую вылечат
ребро ладони
через колено шею

перегнёт
недолёт рукавицы ежовой:
«*вот ещё один дом*
как игла или шурф
как разбег с длинной верёвкой
без змея бумажного»

не связан как прутья метлы
корпией фильма
отдельные ветки живые
блокнот для полёта
(капля за каплей)

сам полёт

море за морем

Sergo Mushtatov

the exact thing of revolution

a stream—a brisk bandage
show me the injection site
an ear lobe
though which they will cure
the rib of the palm
through the knee the neck

it goes too far
an undershoot by the iron fist
“here’s one more house
like a needle or a mine shaft
like launching a long rope
without a kite”

not bound like broom bristles
with linty film
individual living branches
a notebook for a journey
(drop by drop)

the journey itself

sea by sea

деревянная кровь 2 (*vers.*

или
вместо семейных портретов — бухты с телом танцора
с тремя гвоздями с обмоткой

с утра — утро

из детской стены выступает доска для прыжков
в незримый бассейн из мебели — пульс

+ миска с вареньем из мелких плодов *из усилий*
+ несколько книг о приливах + карандаш

человек как рейс (*без ярма ермака*) для записок
язык певицы с подробным потопом
разбух до размеров сада *на зиму заготовка корон*
солнц

(

или
назваться большим пальцем ноги на холод
пробовать спусковое озеро
растворимым письмом в государство сапог)

в порту твой внутренний бегун : *“не покажет*
кардиограмма что я не сердце не тело
только наблюдаю за ним…”

в шлюпке распухшей анплакты с мотками струй

приём внутрь на почтовой марке канады
чёрные дети садят негатив снеговика за борт
за краевид титров

(

теле-полоски-тату *на всех каналах* чёрного) ящика
гид по ремонту хвойных повторов
обут в кирпичи вместо валенок взял меня
ёлочным шаром примерил куда припиздюлить

wooden blood 2 (*vers.*

or
instead of family portraits — a coil with the body of a dancer
with three clusters winding

from morning — morning

a springboard juts from the children's wall
to the invisible pool from the furniture — a pulse

+ a bowl of jam from fine fruit *from effort*
+ a few books on rising tides + a pencil

man is like a flight *(without the yolk of yermak)* for notes
the tongue of a soprano with a deliberate flood
swells to the size of an orchard *a stash of sun crowns*
for winter

(

or
to call yourself "a big toe" for the cold
to try the drained lake
with a soluble letter to the government boot

at the port your inner runner: *"won't show the cardiogram that I am not heart not body*
I just look after them…"

in the inflatable boat unplugged with skeins of spurts
taking by mouth on the postage stamp of canada

black children plant the negative of a snowman
overboard
beyond the edge of subtitles

(

tele-striped-tattoo *on all the channels* of a black) box
a guide for repairs of coniferous replays
shod in brick instead of *valenki* took me
as a christmas ball tried to screw on

в протоптанном воздухе в населённом пунктире
будто наволю выпущен шланг пожарный
под сильным напором

перевод на язык лонжеронов с языка посадок

(как теракт потерять)
с именем ультракоротким сплюнуть лингам
на дорогу

(

саженцы моря с разбега

in the trodden air in the populated dotted line
as if a fire hose is on the loose released
under strong pressure

translation in the language of a wing from the language of a landing

(as if the terrorist act would be lost)
with an ultrashort name spits a lingam
on the street

(

seedlings of the sea take a running start

надувні пікселі (коло-качка-прикордонник
ковадло скапи та інш.) прямують на пів<...>захід
данте лишає валізу лімбів в камерах слова

(пазли до М.Я.)[1]

між розмовником зябер та хмарой троянд часу сплав
усмішки пса з відкритим листом без пілота ока міст

між підземним серцем та стежкою з музею світла
водоспади в обіймах титри (тут) видих-підручник
губиться на снігу намір-крапля вщент рух орбіт на зрізах
пнів шкло губиться варта в небі прямостоячем*: «завжди*

початок» зараз деревам не має потреби в зубах літер

спора (станом на завтра) човен та берег (доцентровий)
з безлюдним повітрям без каменю дах ціль-чоло та праща
між кожним ранком та морем ось він ковток-політ новий
навпомацки лімфа нотує сходи джерел: «*далі буде*

разом» (дихає глибоко мотанка після парт перегорнутих
лінз в солі вітер хребет А творець — вперед в карпати!)
[2]

inflatable pixels (circle-duck-border guard
anvil icicles and others) they head nor — sou <…> west
dante leaves a suitcase of rings in the chambers of the word

(puzzles to M. Y.)[3]

amidst the phrase-book of gills and rose cloud of time is situated a floating
dog's smile with an open letter missing the pilot's eye of the city

amidst the underground heart and the path from the museum of light
waterfalls in embraces captions (here) a textbook on exhalation
is completely lost on the snow the intention-droplet the movement of orbits on bisections
of stumps the glass fades the guard in the straight standing sky: *"always*

the beginning" now the trees don't need the teeth of disputing

letters (according to the situation tomorrow) the boat and shore (centripidal)
with deserted air without stone a roof a target-brow and a sling shot
between every morning and the sea here it is a new gulp-flight
groping a lymph that notes the shoots of springs "*will be*

together" (a ragdoll breathes deeply after turned school-desks
lenses in salt the wind a ridge And the creator — forward to the Carpathians!)[4]

Translated by Grace Mahoney

Лесик Панасюк

Грудень

Чому чи радше куди ми тікаємо з цієї постійної зими

Коло на снігу накреслене циркулем прив’язаного пса
чорне мов записана на легенях курця ідеологічно неправильна музика
джаз на кістках
сірі звуки собачого кашлю не дають розібрати слова

Старенька кричить у слухавку крізь роки
повільно ступає по снігу мелодією що рівновагу тримає на голці грамофона
вчепилася за розмову наче за порятунок
сліди її на снігу пунктирами для відрізу

Бездомні намагаються танцювати під цей ламаний ритм ранкової вулиці
бездомні сьогодні гуляють у нашому одязі
як личать їм наші вбрання і розкидані рухи в повітрі

Рухи розкидані у повітрі
коло накреслене на снігу
пунктир слідів на снігу
музика між голкою втечі і темною борозною зими
вдаємо що танцюємо
вирізаємо фрази з контексту
вириваємо місцини з ландшафту
вдихаємо музику поки шворка закручується навколо стовпа

Усі наші зусилля врешті притискають нас паруючими обличчями
до бетонного пальця що затуляє собою останнє слово

яке можемо використати проти себе

Lesyk Panasiuk

December

Why or rather where are we running out of this constant winter

A circle etched in the snow with the draughtsman’s compass of a chained dog
black as ideologically incorrect music recorded on the lungs of a smoker
jazz on bones
you can’t make out the words over the gray sounds of the dog’s cough

An old woman yells into the receiver through years
stepping slowly through the snow she is a melody balancing on a gramophone needle
she clings to the conversation like a lifeline
her tracks in the snow make dotted lines to cut along

Homeless people try dancing to the ruptured rhythm of this morning street
homeless people today stroll about in our clothes
how well our garments and movements scattered on the winds suit them

Scattered movements on the winds
in the snow the circle etched
in the snow the tracks a dotted line
music between the needle of escape and the dark groove of winter
we pretend we’re dancing
we cut phrases out of context
we take places out of the landscape

we breathe in music while the leash wraps around the pole

All our straining merely presses our steaming faces against
the concrete finger that obscures the last word
that we might use against ourselves

Поки вслухаюся в запах тепла

Що стається з вірою коли закривають останню церкву
що стається зі світлом яке завжди було всередині
чи починають горіти яскравіше вивіски пабів і барів
чи починають довше працювати ломбарди і секонд-хенди

Вечірні ліхтарі вугільного терміналу забруднюють річку світлом
вода в масних і блискучих плямах наче серветка після вечері
ніхто не зауважив написані слова
літери розпливаються мов у тихій постійній молитві

Настільна лампа схилилася монахинею над моїм столом
обличчя її таке чисте що сліпить очі
і поки вслухаюся в запах тепла
хтось перелазить паркан
підсвічує ліхтариком телефона
і пише на стіні церкви
тут був Ісус

Порожній футляр

Навіть космонавти помирають
і їхні душі прибиває до землі наче тіла п’яниць

Тепер не піднятись у космос
а лежати всередині футляра від контрабаса
котрий чорною дірою затягує в себе концертні зали із пустками вільних місць

Музика викорчувана із тіла ночі
вирвана ніби кістка
яка виблискує вією біля ока собачої буди

Але сьогодні не почуєш гарчання
яке б вишукувало на спині найменшу струну
музику вкрадено
кроки солдатів збиваються з ритму
вулики церков сьогодні без бджіл
цвіркуни мовчать
співаки застуджені
тільки десь за склом ілюмінатора пролітає самотній контрабас

Whilst I Listen Hard to the Scent of Warmth

What happens to faith when they close the last church
what happens to the light that was always inside
do the signs in front of bars and clubs really shine brighter
do pawn shops and thrift stores really stay open longer

At night the lights of the coal terminal sully the river with their glow
the water shines with oily splotches like a napkin after dinner
nobody noticed the words written there
the letters blur like a murmur of permanent prayer

The lamp bent over my desk like a nun
her face so pure it blinds your eyes
and whilst I listen hard to the scent of warmth
someone hops over the fence
using their phone as a flashlight
and writes on the wall of the church
Jesus was here

An Empty Case

Even astronauts die
and their souls are hammered to the earth like the bodies of drunks

There’s no more going up in space
but you can lie down inside a case for a double bass
a black hole that sucks in concert halls with the void of vacant seats

Music uprooted from the body of the night
ripped out as if it were a bone
that glimmers like a lash by the eye of a doghouse

But there could be no growling today
to touch the tiniest string on your back
the music has been stolen
the footfalls of soldiers are out of rhythm
today the honeycombs of churches are without bees
the crickets are silent
the singers have come down with colds
there’s just a lonely double bass flying past the viewport

Translated by Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler and Reilly Costigan-Humes

Антон Полунін

огидний маєш померти

часом воно солодке як димний порох
сум і пурпур
я роблюся високим
я клей-трава
гупаю в стелю
гепаюсь на матрац
солодкі мухи на підвіконні
рідини в блідих животах
огорнутих лакмусовим папером
живі
татата
напишу як відпустить
четвертого
дня вони глянули горі
і стали боятись
не бійтесь сказав
найкращий

фло 2

світ змінюється поки ти їблуєш
жертовний лій
щасливий квиток в ротовій
в кондитерському небі оплавлені завитки
гільгамеш гине мов гамлет
біля води
перекреслений горизонтом

інший

селадор принц мокрих земель
заносить квітковий меч
пилок золотий нерухомить повітря
пелюстки летять
голубі пломеніє
плащ із декстрози і суму
виродок викреслений з вікна
змінюється
ти натискаєш skip

Anton Polunin

ugly you have to die

sometimes it’s sweet like gunpowder
sadness and purple
I make myself tall
I’m glue-grass
I slam into the ceiling
fall on the mattress
sweet flies on the windowsill
liquids in pale bellies
wrapped in litmus paper
are alive
dadada
I’ll write when it lets go
on the fourth
day they looked up
and began to fear
don’t fear said
the best

flo 2

the world changes while you’re fucking around
sacrificial tallow
a lucky ticket in the oral cavity
melted curlicues in the candy sky
gilgamesh dies like hamlet
near the water
crossed by the horizon

another

celador prince of wet lands
draws his flower sword
the golden pollen immobilizes the air
blue petals fly
a trenchcoat
of dextrose and sadness flames up
a monster crossed out of the window
changes
 you press skip

біодерма

ковток провалюється повітряні пухирі
підпирають льодяну амальгаму
мга цідиться крізь підлогу
четверта ранку двійник
відчиняє своїм ключем
і не знявши чобіт
відключається долілиць на дивані
стягуєш з нього свій
пуховик мокрий від мокрого
снігу знімаєш пропахлий
улюбленим одеколоном шарф
намотуєш на кулак мов
ланцюг
допельгангер стогне крізь сон
як це роблять усі
чия душа знаходиться ззовні
кімнату наповнює алкогольний туман
повітряні пухирі
закорковують батареї
спітнілий і синій у
рідкокристалічнім світінні
і вервах диму
втикаєш в xhamster
святе серце
тягне мене туди куди я не хочу
з любов'ю
антон

bioderma

the gulp bursts the air blisters
buttresses the ice amalgam
mist filters through the floor
at four am a double
opens the door with his key
and not taking off his boots
flops face down onto the sofa
you take your down coat off him
wet from the wet
snow you remove the scarf
scented with your favorite cologne
wrap it around your fist like
a chain
your doppelganger moans in his sleep
just like everyone whose
soul is on the outside does
an alcoholic fog fills the room
air blisters
plug up the radiators
sweaty and blue in
the sparse, crystal light
and ropes of smoke
you zone out on xhamster
a holy heart
pulls me where I don’t want to go
with love
anton

в южном крыле

изыди вогнись
огонек беззвучный в руке
шелушащийся лак
меж листами исписанными
непотребством
если сердце твое разрывается или молчит
вот считалочка
в южном
крыле
флигелек
вальсок
в голове
жестокий
пятый
давай
говорить по слогам
частные трагедии века сорокового
таращится с экрана черно-бело
сорокооко
чернО
белО
давай говорить о простом
остановимся на
берегу пруда
здесь имею соображение
обрезаться о тросник
молчать минуту
другую
потом еще

in the southern wing

come out bend in
a silent fire in your hand
the varnish flakes
between pages covered in written
obscenities
if your heart breaks or is silent
there’s a counting rhyme
in the southern
wing
the ell
a waltz
in your head
the cruel
fifth
come on
talk in syllables
private tragedies of the forties
stare out from the black-and-white screen
a four-eyed
black
white
let’s talk about simple things
we’ll stay on the
bank of the pond
here I have an idea
to cut myself on the reeds
be quiet a minute
another
and then one more

another angry voice

где авель брат твой каин
расставь запятые
кассиопея зигзит над тобой
микроволновка крушит ожидания
где брат твой каин авель
и что за подкладкой пуховика твоего
может это ключ
нет
может это мышь
нет
может зародыш безумия
скользкий и розовый
как грейпфрут разрезанный пополам
или ложечка
серебрянная надежда отлипшая от ребра
смещенный центр тяжести
где
да вот же
еще раз
нет
устойство выпавшее из разжатой ладони
загорается голубым
кожа отсюда досюда
да будет воля твоя вообще
но сегодня
давай без этого

another angry voice

where abel is thy brother cain
place the commas
cassiopeia howls above you
the microwave shatters expectations
where is thy brother cain abel
and what's in the lining of your coat
maybe it's a key
no
maybe it's a mouse
no
maybe a germ of madness
slippery and pink
like a grapefruit cut in half
or a spoon
silver hope peeled from a rib
a displaced center of gravity
where
look here
again
no
a device fallen from a clenched palm
lights up blue
skin from here to here
yeah, in general thy will be done
but today
let's go without it

Translated by Ali Kinsella

Ірина Шувалова

ти заслуговуєш на більше

чому ти думаєш що заслуговуєш на більше

ти а не дівчинка що підскакує на вибоїнах під дощем
на задньому сидінні батьківського мопеда

ти а не дідо з жовтою цигаркою між жовтих зубів
що полоще сорочки в зеленавій воді під мостом

ти а не той хто не доживе до понеділка

ти а не серйозний водій автобуса з родимою плямою на щоці
в піджаку з червоною нашивкою

ти а не той хто тре рукавом запотілу шибу автобусне вікно
хто хоче побачити що за нею

ти а не продавчиня квітів

ти а не пес що перебігає автомобільне шосе по діагоналі
пес діагональ якого переривається

ти а не чувак у зеленій куртці

ти — а не всі хто не ти
ти — а не бодай хтось із них

чому ти думаєш що заслуговуєш на більше
коли цьому небові зовсім нема чого дати
коло воно породжавало все нам — численним —

і тепер дивися: порожнє світиться над містом
як біла емальована миска

часом світло здвигнеться візьметься брижами
як скатерка під якою ховаються діти
мембрана за якою тремтить
чутливе нутро їхнього таємного світу
за якою світ триває завжди —
легкий ворухкий незмінний

Iryna Shuvalova

you deserve more

why do you think you deserve more

you, not a girl on the back seat of her dad’s moped
hopping up and down on the bumpy road in the rain

you, not an old man with a yellow cigarette between yellow teeth
who rinses his shirts in the green water under the bridge

you, not someone who won’t live till monday

you, not a solemn bus driver with a birthmark on his cheek
in a jacket with a red armband

you, not the one who wipes the foggy glass of the bus window with his sleeve to see what’s beyond it

you, not the lady selling flowers

you, not the dog who runs diagonally across the highway
the dog whose diagonal gets interrupted

you, not the dude in the green jacket

you — not all those who aren’t you
you — not even one of them

why do you think you deserve more
when the sky has nothing else to give
when it has passed everything out to us, the numerous

and now look — it shines empty above the city
like a white enamel bowl

sometimes the light shifts and folds up
like a tablecloth the kids hide under
a membrane that something trembles behind
the sensitive innards of their secret world
where the world lasts forever
airy agile unchanging

чекаєш що гра скінчиться завісу відсунуть а там

але там тільки сіре тане у сірому
тільки світло тане у світлі
там тільки — що це? дивися —
дрібка
ще дрібка

ой сніг

в такому густому тумані

в такому густому тумані
сокира, описавши в повітрі дугу,
не поціляє в дерево,
бо дерево непомітно відступає

в такому густому тумані
перелітні птахи
вдягають червоні шапочки крику,
аби не загубитися

в такому густому тумані
із землі виростають стіни
а ми — наївні, як янголи —
крізь них проходимо

в такому густому тумані
ріки підбирають довгі поли
й біжать наввипередки навспак
до власних витоків

в такому густому тумані
голоси гуляють
окремо від людей
в імлі тримаються за руки

в такому густому тумані
рушниця довго
висить на сцені забута
і не вистрілює

you wait for the game to be over the curtain drawn back and there

but there it’s just grey melting into grey
just light melting into light
just — what’s that? look
a crumb
another crumb

oh, snow

in such thick fog

in such thick fog
a hatchet describing an arc in the air
doesn’t hit the tree
because the tree inches back unnoticed

in such thick fog
the migrating birds
put on their red caps of cries
so as not to get lost

in such thick fog
walls grow up from the earth
and we — naïve, like angels —
pass through them

in such thick fog
the rivers pick up their long skirts
and race each other back
to their sources

in such thick fog
voices wandering
separate from people
hold hands in the mist

in such thick fog
the rifle hangs for a long time
on the stage, forgotten
and doesn’t fire

ці руки

ці руки в яких лежить твоє серце дивися
які вони вправні теплі байдужі
як торкаються чашки, бильця крісла, ножа
зламаної гілки, зляканої щоки

дивись як ці руки стискаються як розпружуються
як вичавлюють з серця твого
маленьку розпачливу пісню

стигле гроно болю
кривавою піною порскає
між перстів

лежи в цих руках як лелик
чиє тимчасове тільце
ще тріпоче від зіткнення з шибою

лежи як знайдена річ
тепер належна комусь, а отже впокорена

лежи як камінь
якому нікуди тікати

ці руки в яких лежить твоє серце
ніжні як повів вітру
коли той змітає міста з широкого лоба землі

знімає дахи з будинків
зазирає всередину зачудованим дитям

бере тебе й піднімає високо-високо
тримаючи обережно
як ляльку

силкується роздивитися
твоє обличчя

these hands

these hands that hold your heart look
how clever warm indifferent they are
how they touch a cup, the arms of a chair, a knife
a broken branch, a frightened cheek

look at these hands clenching, then unclasping
squeezing from your heart
a small, desperate song

a ripe grape bunch of pain
splashes bloody foam
all over the fingers

lie in these hands like a bat
whose temporary body
is still quivering from hitting the windowpane

lie like a found object
now belonging to someone, therefore tame

lie like a stone
with nowhere to flee

these hands that hold your heart
are gentle like a breath of wind
when it sweeps cities from the earth’s wide brow

blows roofs from the houses
peeks in like an awestruck child

takes you and lifts you up and up
holding you carefully
like a doll

struggling to make out
your face

Translated by Anand Dibble

Яніс Сінайко

головы упрощаются
безостановочно

лишь мышечный
шёпот их

дотлевает с обеих сторон
как следы от пощёчины

уши вобрали
землю

у входа
песня

ломается

нет

слова
кроме
удара в полость

в какой-нибудь громкой
тьме стальных динозавров

дрожащий язык скребёт
по реке перемещая одни
лжесвидетельства

Yanis Sinaiko

heads growing ever simpler
ceaselessly

their muscular
whisper

smoldering on both sides
like slap marks

ears filled up with
earth

by the entrance
a song

breaking

not

word
except for
a stomp to the cavity

in some thunderous
darkness of steel dinosaurs
a trembling tongue scrapes
down the river shuttling only
false testimonies

две твои головы по очереди
отрывают
и любят друг друга

я
прячусь в углу кровати

когда шорох
утихнет

четыре плеча
взвоют
в попытке изобразить напрасное

из глубины

исторгнут
танцующий сад

стальные стрекозы несут на себе
уцелевшую кость
прародителя

и ты

перед этим движением
высохший возглас зелёный

ведь
никто
не сказал что выпорхнет музыка

это в тебя
никто
вообще ничего
не сказал

two of your heads by turns
tear each other off
make love

I hide
in the corner of the bed

when the rustling
dies down

four shoulders
will holler
in an attempt to depict the futile

from the depth

cast out—
a dancing garden

steel dragonflies carry on their backs
a salvaged bone
of an ancestor

and you

before this movement
a desiccated green yelp

for
nobody
said that music would flutter out

it’s into you
that nobody
uttered
anything

спустя столетия

кто-то
последний

идущий по этой
выровненной
земле

споткнётся

о тело
чудовища

выползшего
внезапно
из-под кровати
предка

язык

лишён языка
ещё только
я
взверивается
в предвозникшую
местность скорее

бесследно

 after centuries

 someone
residual

walking across this
levelled
land
 will stumble

over a body
of a monster

creeping out
suddenly
from under the bed
of an ancestor

 language

rid of a tongue
 only
 I
 detherionates
 into the preimagined
space rather

 without a trace

говори там где любишь
мгновенно:
привкус гниющей решётки во рту
прибитое к ней тело
утопленника
опустошённые корабли языка от
мышцы
к мышце
хотя бы осмелься
сдержать
и вот уже челюсти рвутся
ко дну
чтобы осев наконец-то вскрикнуть
от боли
взаправду

из лица
земли

сорванного

тобою в ответ

вопит

всё

ещё щадящая
неословленность

 speak where you love
 instantaneously
 a taste of rotting grate in the mouth

 a body of a drowned man
washed up against it
 devastated ships of language from
muscle
 to muscle
 dare at least
 to hold back
 and now the jaws break
for the bottom
 so that, settling, they could finally cry out
from pain
 for real

 out of the face
of soil

ripped out

by you in retort

shrieks

 all

the same still-sparing
unwordedness

Translated by Oksana Maksymchuk

Остап Сливинський

Алінка в саду з великим собакою

Скільки ж він жив? Усі діти — всі п’ятеро —
на ньому їздили верхи.
Коли дійшла моя черга,
він вже осліп, і крутився на місці, як цуценя,
що полює за власним хвостом, —
сумний здитинілий пес. Відтоді
стільки сталося всього,
що й не відбулося нічого.
Добре, що пожежі ніколи не змовляються між собою,
і я прослизала між них.
Що вітри,
як сільські шмаркачі, хіба що свистіли мені услід.
Лише ті, що забирали братів і зазирали в каструлі,
добре знали свій фах.
Зате
стільки було рятівників, яким хотілось сміятися в очі.
Стільки було порадників, що боялись
обсмалити рукав.
Стільки було вчителів, що я й далі кручуся на місці —
як на тому старому фото —
маленька жінка верхи на великому псі.

Ostap Slyvynsky

Alinka in the Garden with a Big Dog

So, how long did he live? All children — all five —
rode astride it.
By the time it was my turn,
he was already blind, and spun in place like a puppy,
hunting for its own tail —
a sad childlike dog. Since then
so much has happened
that nothing has happened.
It's a good thing that fires never conspire with one another,
and I slipped between them.
That winds,
like small-town snot-noses, did nothing more than whistle after me.
Only those who took away my brothers and peeked into the pans,
knew their profession well.
But
there were so many rescuers in whose faces I wanted to laugh.
There were so many advisers who were afraid
of getting their sleeves singed.
So many teachers there were that I keep spinning in place —
as in that old photo —
a little woman riding on a big dog.

Сестра

Ми намріяли собі так багато життя, сестро.
Там не було холодних сидінь, чекання
за турнікетом, безсонних ночей в лікарняному
коридорі. Там не було автобусів,
у яких будять нас світлом ліхтарика.
Там не було запахів йоду й сечі.
Ми розганялись на пагорбі й бігли до самої води,
і пливли по поверхні безодні раніше,
ніж встигали подумати.
Жалем не вміли користуватись,
довкола любові ходили, як ходять
довкола передчасно розквітлого дерева.
Ми хотіли прожити життя безсонне й густе,
як музика аргентинського берега,
життя цільне, як злиток,
а за таким жалюгідним курсом обміняли його на радість.
І тепер, коли нас зачинили всередині
душної ночі — чи зможу я хоча б попрощатись з тобою, сестро?

Sister

We dreamed of so much life, sister.
There were no cold seats, waiting
behind the turnstile, sleepless nights in the hospital
corridor. There were no buses
in which we are awakened by the flashlight.
There were no smells of iodine or urine.
We hurried down the hill and ran to the very water,
and floated on the surface of the abyss before
realizing it.
We did not know how to make use of pity,
we walked around love as people walk
around a prematurely blossoming tree.
We wanted to live a sleepless and dense life,
like the music of the Argentine coast,
life solid as an ingot,
but exchanged it for joy at such a paltry rate.
And now when we are locked inside
a stuffy night — could I at least say goodbye to you, sister?

* * *

Повітря, яке вдихаєш, щоб втриматися
на поверхні води, повітря,
якого бракує, щоб втриматися.
Повітря, яке видихаєш разом із криком,
повітря, яке видихаєш замість крику.
Повітря, якого лишилось так мало після усіх
тих років.
Повітря було б страшним, якби було видимим.
Тепер, коли не говоримо вже більше доби, повітря
тверде, як руків’я пробачення.
Повітря, гори мені, задуши мене,
заткни мені безтолковий рот.
Зроби так, щоб ми лопотіли, як два рукави
однієї сорочки, як прапор, під яким ніхто не піде у бій.
Повітря кляте, яке не втримало батька.
Відступи нарешті й від мене, звільни мене
від своєї всюдисущої милості, від своєї
прісної усмішки сестри милосердя.
Обіцяю: далеко я не втечу, повітря.

* * *

The air you inhale to stay on
the surface of the water, the air,
which is not sufficient to enable you to stay up.
The air you exhale with a scream,
the air you exhale instead of screaming.
The air, of which so little is left after all
those years.
The air would be scary if it were visible.
Now, after not talking for more than a day, the air is
firm, like the handle of forgiveness.
Air, burn for me, choke me,
shut my silly mouth.
Make us flutter like two sleeves
of the same shirt, like a flag under which no one would go into battle.
Damned air, that did not hold up my father.
Step away at last from me as well, set me free
from your ubiquitous grace, from your
insipid smile of the sister of mercy.
I promise: I won’t get far, air.

Translated by Alex Averbuch

Михайло Жаржайло

ной

магічний реалізм перетворився на буденність
настільки що аж
атланти позлазили з-під балконів
і розійшлися по кнайпах
колони розгорнулися наче сувої
і з них також атланти повистрибували
повисипалися як жуки
трішки бідніші і тому кремезніші
та й собі пішли пиячити в стрийський парк
бити морду пам'ятнику яна кілінського
а каріатиди з горя стали невидимками
розтанули
хто у повітрі хто в камені хто у воді
а найостанніші ті що йшли за своїми чоловіками
розчинилися у пиві та крові
кальвадосах та бурбонах
і в лімфі
а іноді в молоці

а найкремезніші з них виходили на 700-річчя
запалювали у руках роги тролейбусів
як бенгальські вогники

і була люта ніч
крижана заметіль
і небо згори наповзло немов металева губка

і снігом засипало землю до самого обрію
а кам'яні цеглини пагорба на якому стояло моє
всевидяче око
розбіглися як щурі

а потім коли танула країна немовби сніг
і прибувала велика вода
наш ковчег вознісся
на вершечку хвиль

а там нагорі його достоту шматочок мила
узяв на долоню
велетенський кам’яний янгол

Mykhailo Zharzhailo

noah

magical realism became a daily routine
so much so that even
the atlantes climbed down from under the balconies
they held up and parted ways to the bars
columns opened like scrolls
and atlantes popped out of them too
spread out like beetles
a little poorer and therefore stronger
and went drinking in stryisky park
kicking the face of jan kiliński on his monument
and the caryatids disappeared out of grief
melted down
some in air some in stone some in water
and the very last who followed their husbands
dissolved in beer and blood
calvados and bourbon
and in lymph
and sometimes in milk

and the strongest of them ended up on 700th anniversary street
lit the horns of trolleybuses like sparklers
in their hands

and it was a fierce night
icy blizzard
and the sky fell like a metal sponge

and snow covered the ground up to the horizon
and the bricks and stones on the hill
where my all-seeing eye stood
ran away like rats

and then while the country was melting down like snow
and the great surge came
our ark ascended
on the tip of the waves

and up there above a giant
stone angel put a piece
of soap in his palm

ноктюрн: поїзд

хліб станційного ліхтаря кришиться на матрац
хліб гучномовців сиплеться на подушку

хліб м'якший за ліжко

між полиць плацкарту
на черствій заслиненій перині
ти самокрутка
гарячий тютюн
на висохлих губах

між полиць плацкарту
ти гербарій між сторінок
купюра замість закладки
паперова секунда у гаманці

між полиць плацкарту
ти гральна карта
валет без голови
кентавр без ніг
купідон без фалоса

кортасар часник під нігтями
катування сторінками

станційний санвузол
рак-музика рак флейти рак саксофону
рак папіроси
ембріон навушника випадає на подушку

комар камертон над вухом
призабутий звук телефонної слухавки
сукровиця ноти «ля»

а поверхня гуде не як камертон
а ніби збити температуру пінцету
жуками низького «до»

коли рвучко долонею зачерпнути зерно хропіння
як спіймати комара сережки
сіпнеться поплавок кадика

nocturne: train

the bread of a station light crumbles on the mattress
the bread of the loudspeakers falls on the pillow

bread is softer than the bed

between berths on a sleeping car
on a stale filthy blanket
you’re a hand-rolled cigarette
hot tobacco
on dry lips

between berths on a sleeping car
you’re a herbarium
a banknote instead of a bookmark
a paper second in a wallet

between berths on a sleeping car
you’re a playing card
a jack without a head
a centaur without legs
a cupid without a phallus

cortazar garlic under fingernails
papercut torture

a station restroom
cancer of music cancer of flute cancer of saxophone
cancer of cigarette
an embryo of an earbud falls on the pillow

a mosquito tuning fork above an ear
the forgotten sound of a telephone receiver
ichor of the note la

and the surface buzzes not like a tuning fork
but as if you were lowering the temperature of tweezers
with the beetles of a low do

when you rapidly scoop the wheat of snoring
the way catching the mosquito of an earring
twitches the fishing float of an adam’s apple

між полиць плацкарту
як між двох спітнілих долонь
ти — оплески

between berths on a sleeping car
as between two sweaty palms
you’re the applause

Translated by John Hennessy and Ostap Kin

Stalinka

Oles Ulianenko

Part Two

The tough old thug, ex-con, and recidivist Nikandrych died in the fall; on top of that, Maria Piskur fell ill—her legs gave out, and she could barely move; from the balcony she regarded the funeral procession with peculiar disapproval as it moved past; so many people had come to the funeral, people nobody in Stalinka knew; a priest, some neighbors, and a dozen of the deceased's blubbery-faced mobster pals—they were the ones who had fetched the priest, who was tripping and stumbling along in his cassock, batting his drooping eyelids over eyes the color of soy sauce; his face was puffy, and when he spoke he drew out his 'o's—all of this indicating that he was not a local. His rough, chapped lips stretched out into a spout; his troubled visage, flushed pink like a child's, would relax and glow divinely whenever a platter with fragrant stuffed cabbage rolls was carried in front of him, or a frosty-blue bottle of vodka. As for the deceased, people said what he liked most was polishing off the *kuknar* brewed from boiled-down poppies, though on hot days he preferred to sip bitter *chyfir* the color of machine oil. After drinking too much he'd take a nap in a sunlit room, his fabled plaid shirt unbuttoned, baring his powerful chest, thickly layered with fat, on the left side of which, right under the nipple, the profiles of Lenin, Stalin, and Karl Marx were tattooed. Nikandrych had lived alone, his home as empty as a yawn; all he had were a couple of stools, a few greasy aluminum cups, and stacks of

newspaper clippings about amnesty and portraits of the leaders under whose rule he had served time; he died of a stroke, right on the gangway to the water plant where he had gotten employment thanks to the intervention of the district police chief, Major Syrovatko; he died under the shade of an American maple tree, right at dawn, and rumor had it that it was Ritka Machinegunner who had discovered the body, she who hawked stolen goods on the side and liked to smoke strong black tobacco; that same October the coffin, wrapped in green velvet (obligatory among mobsters) was carried to Baikiv Cemetery under a windswept and spring-like sky accompanied by the unrestrained lamentation of women, as damp windowpanes howled with the wind. Nikandrych's comrades wheezed and gasped as they strained their flagging deep voices to accompany the deceased on his final journey; lifting their hardened and bluish faces upward, they crooned "… gradually you shriveled and quietly you set off on your journey …" Now and then their voices abruptly fell silent as the silent gray procession, brightened by the flashy scarves the old mobsters wore around their necks, snaked on and pushed forward slowly, winding around the shabby corners along Vasylkivska Street, pausing for a moment as if to lower banners in respect; they turned down Kozatska Street, glided through the lower neighborhood (shadows falling on a wall of weeds as tall as a man), and rumbled down Dimievska Street, where the People's Rubber Factory buzzed mournfully in gulps of steam; rubbing the backs of their necks, the workmen removed their caps. And then at the cemetery, in the section where heroes of labor and of the fatherland are buried, as clumps of dirt mixed with chlorine thumped and banged the top of the casket, a jangle of guitar strings startled the congregated mourners who were singing "It was a dark and lonely night" out of tune: above the mound, tamped down with shovels and covered with still-fresh asters, water-sprinkled roses,

carnations, and tea roses, half of their petals lost along the way, the shrill sounds of the song “… How Katia Fiddlestick beguiled the procurator and married him …” squealed out like a nail scratching glass. Astonished, the priest moved off to the side, half extinguishing the censer—he even seemed to view the group of aging men in tweed jackets sympathetically. Kostia Runt from Kozatska Street brushed a sleeve across his lips, unleashed the drinker’s gem “… If I had piles of money …,” and sidled over to the priest to kiss the cross, but was rebuffed. A sudden cold wind from the east tore through and then died down; a small crowd of mourners made themselves comfortable around the tables under the acacia trees: glasses clinked noisily, bottles were passed around, greetings were shouted across three or four people, the fragrant bouquets of asters were pushed aside — “what the hell are they here for!” Nikandrych, the last of the Stalin-era thugs, was being memorialized. Maria took sips from a wineglass, choking down spasms of nausea; at moments she felt like slapping someone across the face or screaming her head off; as if forgetting how old she was, she kept stroking the places on her head where so many years ago she had two girlish pigtails.

It was after that autumn, the sky sweeping into the unknown, the trees along Vasylkivska Street wearing crimson crowns, the birds assuming a silent mode, except for the sparrows chattering and scattering in rowdy gray bunches over the time-worn sidewalks; hemmed in by the motionless blocks of buildings and the many-hued hill of the Holosiiv forest looming on the horizon, banded with the already cooling asphalt pathways the sun hadn’t truly warmed (the blinding white disc in the sky manifestly fading); it was in that time, when nights were illuminated by the bile-yellow glow of streetlamps and persistent showers bathed the hopelessly desolate days; where yards seemed to retreat in patches like snails into shells, muddy house plots turned over by the dozens of feet passing

through, not yet the time for putting things in order—working days, sweaty times in Stalinka; it was in these yards, the air heavy with the tart odor of marijuana and the rancid smell of unfermented brandy mush drifting from a hidden den (as sporadic gusts of harsh eastern winds broke through), and spiked with drawn out, hyped-up “jail songs” played on old-fashioned tape players—it was then and there that Horik Piskariov did his growing up. It coincided with the death of Nikandrych and the onset of Maria’s illness (misfortune likes company); on a balcony latticed with loops of wild grape vines and crisscrossed with clotheslines, in the grayish light of dawn reflected in the windowpanes, having just returned from partying (nice days mixed up with cold days), Horik took cover so his mother wouldn’t see him; he wanted to have a bit of private time, to roll a cigarette, to listen to the spoons clinking in teacups in the apartments across the way and to glimpse Nilka’s shadow passing across the windowpane; none of it came to pass, though, so Horik rekindled memories of those sunless, gray days when all of them—Vaska Glycerin, Khoma Redistributor, and Vovka Skull, a/k/a Moidodyr, a/k/a Mister Peps-Mare’s-Eye—passed the time playing 21 in a basement on Lomonosov Street cluttered with tattered old mattresses; the same basement, with the dance hall opposite, where prostitutes and their johns often hid from the somewhat drunk neighborhood watch teams, though it was generally acknowledged that the hideaway was the rightful property of the gang led by Horik Piskariov, who was at that moment sidling back and forth along the balcony’s wet railing and thinking about the gang, which at that time of day would have been slurping sour beer and finishing off the remnant of a joint of cheap grass, talking nonsense about women and future street fights. Usually, the conversation went something like this: “Who you kidding, that blondie is an unearthly beauty and a monocle-wearing friend … so I tell her, like I am a man—maybe not

an intellectual, but I can do a whole lot more than those snot-nosed boys … and I told her lots of stuff, pouring the sweet stuff in her ears. I see it’s working; I swear.” “You’re making it all up!” “And I stuck it to her without taking my pants off!” “What a …” It was a miserable fall morning, with sleet falling; a thin film of ice glazed the puddles, the water plant emitted steam with a roar, the rooks beat their wings, slashing through the shadows that hung over the frost-bitten earth, their cries lost in the morning emptiness as they coasted in the air, tightening loop after loop, maneuvering to snuggle down in the poplar branches, sticking out their humped beaks at the yards and the playgrounds. The depressing grayness grew thicker, here and there sunbeams bounced around in the black holes of building courtyards, barely warming the stucco cornices once they broke through all the way; arched courtyard passages gaped vacantly like bottomless wells. A corpse lay supine opposite the stone steps of the water plant, a broken arm beneath it, covered with a big red cloth, hastily thrown over the deceased man to shield him from annoying looks; a blast of air shot through, lifting the edges of the cloth, revealing the silky-smooth, waxen face of Nikandrych, his blank glassy eyes reflecting clusters of yellow leaves. All night, mad with the busied racket of birds and the unsettled air, heavy with humidity from the east, the dogs furiously yanked at their leashes and wildly clawed the dirt, trying to break free; at dawn a blinding gold spire burned through the air above the Holosiiv hill, and the massive buildings of the Agricultural Exhibit Center emerged out of the oily morning fog; the dogs yelped and then quieted down; whimpering, they crawled back into their doghouses. An ambulance droned close by, belching fumes; the puddles, like a blue haze, spread widely, fusing with the thin slash that was the horizon; after an instant as fleeting as the dazzling flash of an insect consumed in a flame, a soft, gentle warmth unexpectedly reached into Horik,

probing his veins, sending tremors up his legs, filling his mouth, quenching it with sweet saliva. Ten of Nikandrych's mates in tweed jackets were carrying the casket; raising their gaunt, parchment-colored faces, they sang snatches of songs as they tottered forward, moving past the lopsided henhouses that in winter served as distilleries for homebrew, rental units, and a warehouse with a place for contraband beneath the floorboards; past dozens of gates painted green and past the birdhouse-filled quiet courtyards where Nikandrych took "protection" money from the residents and where more than one widow wrung her hands in grief before the portrait of her "provider"—Nikandrych administered justice quickly and brutally, but fairly; it was said that it was impossible to escape the hand of his just retribution. In these neighborhoods Nikandrych was the master. He served as mentor to the local punks, and many times he said to Horik, "You reek of sentimentality, kiddo," as he stroked the top of his head. The kid was repulsed and tried to stay as far away from him as possible, because it was said that the old hooligan had defiled many a boy; drunk on *kuknar*, he smothered the boys and, a cigarette in his mouth, humped them on a homemade mat. Afterwards, wiping his beet red face, he'd sit puffing and grunting, his pudgy hands in his lap (his short fingers a bunch of pink sausages); for the longest time he'd just sit there in the rusty half-darkness, staring at a greasy portrait of Stalin, mumbling something like, "Ye-e-es, hard times are here. And you, kid, keep it quiet ... shit happens"; and wagging a stubby finger he'd scold this latest victim who, half naked, lay cringing on the mat, pressing his legs together. This activity was brought to the attention of Major Syrovatko. The major fretted over the information for days, pacing back and forth across his office; people heard him talking to himself: "Maybe they're lying ... maybe it's completely ...," he muttered, sucking on a *Bilomor* cigarette, before finally picking up a sheet of

white paper and writing an arrest warrant in rounded letters.

The next morning, he would pull it out of the drawer, lay it down in front of him, and, after a brief pause, turn toward the window, rip the warrant up, and throw it in the wastebasket. Cursing, he would wander off to hang around the boiler room some, nervously sucking on a cigarette: “Maybe that son-of-a-bitch Nikandrych isn’t on duty today”; and hurling the cigarette stub away, he’d take off for the boiler room. Still walking at full speed (one leg still in the air), he’d blast out a warning, and after finally composing himself, after adjusting the lapels of his blue navy jacket, he would demand, “How many times, you old bastard—how many times do I have to warn you! I’ll have you locked up—not in the zone, but in the venereal disease clinic on Saksahanskoho Street.” The thug threw up his hands, “Why do you say that boss? It’s not true, I swear, Savielich ...” Catching his breath after that brash outburst, a stunned Syrovatko would remove his beret and wipe his forehead; he’d sit himself down on the Chinese wicker chair, light a cigarette, and, quietly sidling up to Nikandrych, say in a near whisper, as if trying to mystify him, “Don’t take this personally, Nikandrych, but I’ve received complaints. Manka Fomenkova. Her Petka has contracted syphilis ...” Innocently, like a helpless child, Nikandrych would spread his hands: “Boss, stop this bullshit. You think Petka hasn’t stuck it into all kinds of places?... And Manka, I’ve known Manka since my mates all passed her around that time—or was it the following year? What year was that boss? Huh, Savielich? Yeah, yeah—she was there hanging around the barracks all the time. As for me, boss, there’s nothing to be making a big deal about ...” “Where would he be sticking it, Nikandrych—that kid, that kid’s just twelve years old!” “And you, how old are you, Savielich? Huh? Why so quiet?” the tough old thug would snort, croaking and chuckling, his face suddenly hardening, his eyes glazing over as he

dropped the familiar, malicious tone. “There you have it. Life is such a beautiful thing,” he’d say, turning up his pudgy palm—it was easy to guess what he meant by a “beautiful life”— “springtime is in the air—yeah, yeah, when I think back to my youth. First let’s enjoy some of that precious *chyfir*, Savielich; you know, we’re the same age, us two ... and not just that,” and here Nikandrych’s face would assume its usual expression; calming Syrovatko down—“we were bound together with a string, a string ... and that string knows so much, so much ... me, what’s it to me ... to me it’s all about prison anyway,” and as Nikandrych was pouring the *kuknar* or *chyfir* Syrovatko would back off, heading toward the door, “Well, I did warn, you,” he would force out of his mouth, fear flashing through his eyes, then adding, “Take down the Father of Nations. It’s time for Leonid Illich to go. And as for prison, neither one of us would last long there.” Nikandrych’s bachelor-button eyes will have frosted over, “You can’t win, Savielich —I swear!” And thus, empty-handed, Major Syrovatko would wind his way back.

Maria called on Syrovatko after each of his visits to Nikandrych, insisting that “that damned criminal” be put away; at first her appeals seemed odd, but eventually the district chief got used to her visits and her pleas, though Maria remained a puzzle to him.

Horik didn’t care that Nikandrych had died, and even though all kinds of things were said about him long afterwards, in the end none of it affected Horik. What won’t evil tongues say! Horik’s curiosity was aroused by talk that hinted at various clandestine criminal acts the deceased had been involved in—they filled him with a serene melancholy, as if a ceremonial tolling of an inner bell; he was confused; his almost childish appraisal of the old man, his respect for the suddenly mortal old crook, was destroyed. Something he didn’t understand unsettled him, something he couldn’t solve on his own; the neighborhood

fights were starting again, which was to be expected, because Nosach, who worked part time in the summer at the dance hall, had set the price of two hundred *karbovantsi* for the basement on Lomonosov Street; and right then something had come over Horik: for days he drifted about, dejected. On top of that, his mother would stagger in from work angered, as if she'd broken free off a leash, spitting out harsh words and acting tough: slapping down a wet rag, she'd sit herself down in the corner, her legs blue and swollen, gazing at Sio-Sio with vacant eyes, and sucking on a cigarette, while Grandma Piskur composed prayers: she had a remarkable knack for composing her own original prayers, insisting they were sacred—the passage of time had wiped her mind clean, giving the impression that a new life had started for the old woman. Besides, this was unfamiliar territory; no one understood what was going on with her; what's more, because there was so much else going on, no one paid much attention to the old woman.

So a bored Horik spent drab days between Kozacha Street and Vasylkivska Street; his thoughts were about Nilka, though not quite on Nilka: his musings resembled an ugly, artless collage, a murky warning about something Horik couldn't handle, like his own thinking; even Mister Peps Mare's-Eye was talking him into paying a visit to hairy-lipped Marfa on Kozacha Street, in the building built of white fireproof bricks where two female lodgers lived, paying rent by working nights, providing services for practically the whole city; though hairy-lipped Marfa was also a fortune-teller, divining the future by laying out the cards: the joker, the king, the ace, the queen—so maybe that was what Mister Peps Mare's-Eye had had in mind, after all. Most likely, though, his suggestion had to do with getting involved in the business with the girls who had lived in Stalinka so long that the locals virtually considered them family. One of them was Nadka, a hot brunette with

an intense, dusky gaze, breasts as big as loaves of bread tumbling out of her blouse—just looking at them took your breath away; and the other one—so sunny, so delicate, as if she'd been bathed in sweet-smelling herbs, a pure untouched girl, though word had it that she was so good in bed, performed so skillfully, that the other, well-baked whores of Stalinka seemed like backward schoolgirls. Her name was Svitlana—it's true, she blossomed only later, but all the guys wanted her because aside from everything else, she told stories in bed, actually just one story in different versions: she was in love with a man, they were penniless yet, went to school together, and they desperately wanted to have it all: to experience everything in the world—to live a life rich with possibilities; but a female friend showed up, having ended up here after she'd worked in all the bordellos of the city; she had even worked at Sultan's, he's the one who taught her all manner of tricks; Mister Peps Mare's-Eye had mentioned Sultan once, telling Horik the story of how one day a stranger appeared, wanting to do business, a filthy *banabak*—an Azerbaijani, or an Armenian; he started doing business, the locals scowled at him, but he set out a whole crate of cognac to keep his spot, and the locals were appeased. Skull even showed the bloke Sultan to Horik from a distance: the day had unfurled in brilliant sunshine, with the sky, the windowpanes, and the people speckled with gold, and the guy they were now calling Sultan was walking along a big, long-walled building on Vasylkivska Street; he walked like a man filled with confidence walks, his complexion glowing like yellow silk, his upper mustached lip turned up, revealing a set of fine white teeth, his body draped in a very proper loose-fitting black suit, very attractive, like his black leather coat; Mister Peps Mare's-Eye, a.k.a. Skull, a.k.a. Moidodyr, clucked: "Look at that ass now, after coming here all bedraggled with a single tattered t-shirt ... we should work him over, Klyk ..." Horik gave Sultan a quick look and felt

disgustingly nauseous—the same queasy sensation he'd felt when he had looked at the dead Nikandrych. His head was swimming; he left abruptly and went home; until noon he watched Nilka brushing her hair through the crack she had left open in the balcony door; the wind played with her hair, tossing it over her shoulders, messing with its multi-hued strands while she stared straight ahead, as if she hadn't noticed Horik; as she kept brushing her hair, she threw him a blistering glance; he felt as if a dozen years had passed, as if she had never slept in his arms.

Things started to clear up for him when he heard talk, gossip, that Nilka, while having coffee and a smoke with a friend—the fleshy redhead Marta, who had already sampled being with a guy—Nilka had supposedly expressed some dissatisfaction, saying "He's sort of alright, that Wolf, but when you're in bed with him he stinks like an animal, almost like a dog ..." Narrowing her eyes, she blew out thin columns of smoke and suddenly felt embarrassed because in truth she hadn't been with a man yet. "Unlike Mesaib…"—and, later, by chance, right before the last day of school, Mister Peps Mare's-Eye ran into her at the post office: dressed all in white, her head half covered in satin bows, she was crying, smearing black mascara all over her pale cheeks, and scratching out curly letters that spelled "Mesaib." At the time Horik was completing his second year in carpentry at the PTU—the late Nikandrych would declare, "You'd think, kiddo, that all we have growing here is beautiful trees." Now, though, he couldn't care less about Mesaib (he *was* upset but felt detached): late mornings he'd fall into bed, pressing his exhausted body into the bedsprings, a sickening sweet queasiness pushed into his throat. That disgusting sweet queasiness stalked him, staying on to ambush him in his shelter; in his time alone Horik imagined the dark chipped windows on the building across the way, ready to pounce on him with full force; clammy with sweat, he shivered; he got up to walk around

the room a bit and recover his senses, only to fall back on the bed, pulling his knees up to his stomach; still that sickly feeling of revulsion dogged him; a cold draft from the grave weighed down on him.

This time he felt faint—his arms felt soft, cottony, uncooperative—he felt like he'd been flung to the bottom of the swamp in which he'd been suffocating from the very beginning; as if deep inside he knew that he was unalterably drawn to that quagmire; in the sliver of a mirror he saw Nilka's delicate hand adjusting her braid, her bare back, water streaming down the groove: all of this disappeared, his consciousness dissolving like strips of color film; he saw himself flying over steep precipices, wrestling his way across brown waves, wandering around unfamiliar places, plummeting into bottomless purple abysses brimming with something muddy, sweet, and slimy. Regaining his senses, he'd imagine Sultan standing straight and tall, like an English dandy, but he couldn't conjure up an image of Mesaib—he'd never been clever or imaginative; all through school, way up to the eighth grade, he'd copy all his tests and language assignments. In quiet moments, when he felt calm and composed, he'd lie on his bed spinning and re-spinning the same loop of images in his mind: Sultan walking down Vasylkivska Street, bathed in a golden glow. But nighttime came; swells of darkness washed over the windowpanes, the glass tinkling; Horik tried to sleep but couldn't; he smoked for a while, lying on his bed and listening to bouts of the gurgling, wheezing cough that tormented his grandmother; and as the stupor crept up and overcame him with its sugary taste and cold touch, he'd force his eyelids open; recovering, he realized that nothing was simple and clear-cut: Sio-Sio's breathing was alarmingly heavy; his mother was cursing obscenities, boxing the pillow with her fists: his teeth hurt; he lay like that for a long time, face-up in the dark, stifling the obscure loathsomeness that was contaminating him from all sides.

There was no solution; he wasn't like Mesaib and Sultan. Something was budding inside, poking around his innards, something sweet and perturbing, deprived of form or name; his mind pushed him, urged him to dive into his memories, but he had so few of them; and that wasn't the problem: he felt a strong impulse, something that demanded (drilling inside his brain like a meaningless wish) that he look deeper and further, to experience that sweetness again and again. At times like that—be it night or day—he'd sit on the balcony waiting for Nilka to start brushing her hair, for the pale blue reflection of her trembling body (it was already cold), and he'd picture her hard nipples inside her bathrobe, the curve of her spine; she'd be brushing her hair and thinking about what Marta had said during a recent smoking break: "He pulls me toward him, that bastard ... shoving that ticklish silk at me, genuine Chinese silk, the stores haven't had anything like it for a long time, even the Armenians at the bazaar don't have it—o-o-o, I was so surprised my mouth dropped open and my legs spread automatically, but he's so old and so ugly and disgusting, you can see the wax coming out of his ears"—Nilka would brush her hair and then the entire family would clink their little spoons in their porcelain cups in the large common room where a large chandelier spreads out like a golden spider, casting shadows onto the furniture; her father was an accountant and her mother worked in a warehouse. "Look at those Kilinichenkos," Maria spat out, "drinking tea all winter and all summer. If you ask me, only lazy people drink tea in the summer ..."

As he watched Nilka, he crafted all kinds of images in his imagination: surprising her with armloads of flowers, taking her for a spin around town and into the country in a brand-new black Volga (to hell with a Mercedes), driving and chatting with Nilka sitting there beside him, offering her a Marlboro; and just as he'd be getting to the best part, Sultan and Mesaib would suddenly appear; but since Horik

had never seen Mesaib's face, Mesaib and Sultan appeared as one figure, after which something in his brain would snap and tiny beads of sweat would dot his forehead; in the end, though, he'd have time to pummel Mesaib and Sultan with his fists—he knew that Nilka was somehow a part of this Sultan-Mesaib partnership; a powerful surge of emotion knocked him over onto the bed; Grandma Piskur's voice, burbling quietly, like water boiling, seemed so far away: "Heaven forbid, they've put a curse or something on him—we'll have to take him to a conjurer or he'll be lost." She was crossing herself and, in her elderly confusion, mixing up the opening and ending of prayers. Horik had a splitting headache. At first he was moving through familiar places, but they seemed less impenetrable—there was a glimmer of something out there; he walked in wild places, alone—no one bothered him; he sank to the lowermost bottom of that ever-present brown murkiness, gradually adjusting to it; this time, though, it was as if the windowpane had cracked, pushed in by an elbow; overhead he saw a little lagoon of pale blue light and himself at the bottom of it; from above he could see himself arriving at a factory, pipes gouging the sky like a stylus, it's dark, damp, and somehow uncomfortable, a gigantic pendulum with belts and a wheel thrashes the air, and he comes in—not now, another time—and eats sweet, syrupy molasses in handfuls; the pendulum thrashes the air, his father stands a bit to the side—though he had never stood like that—and watches silently, attentively. Finally, Nikandrych emerges—Horik had been expecting him to appear, after all, and, what's more, had the feeling that someone was secretly spying on him; he heard the drone of the metro, felt something bitter on his lips, which then receded; wonders assailed him—everything he had ever seen in his brief life. And high up, above everything, there's Nikandrych, dispensing advice (but of a kind you would never have heard from the old thug) in a mocking tone, though

articulating properly, in a kind, melodious murmur, like that of people talking at dawn, when the energy to tell lies has gone. And in a flash something struck him like a bolt of electricity, and Horik saw evenly-cut, unappealing slices of meat, and close by someone was talking, copiously asserting clever things that Horik, owing to his lack of education, could not grasp; a hole gaped to the left, and sticky, gelatinous bits that looked like clumps of ejected human sperm flowed into that opening; Nikandrych picked up a plate of meat and, after flicking off the specks of fat white maggots with his baby finger, offered the plate to Horik; all of a sudden the screech of a subway train sounded; green waves of light are flashing like glass shattering to bits, and suddenly Horik realizes that this is the second time in one day that he's seeing this: he is walking, tripping over his own feet, clinging to his father's finger; in his left hand his father is holding a bouquet of asters and Horik is an adult—his body is that of a child but in his mind he's an adult—and a tractor on treads edges toward them, emitting dense fumes of acrid diesel. Ahead, Horik sees a wet kitten, its fur bristling; underfoot, the ground rumbles, the noise intensifies, and the kitten raises its little head; overhead, the sky soars high above his father, above Horik; above Vasylkivska street, a black shadow, resembling a man, is blocking out the sun's yellow sphere—a black shadow; to Horik it seems that the shadow is ignoring him; the tractor lets out a screech; the treads send chunks of asphalt flying; the kitten vanishes beneath the weight of the cast iron, bits and pieces of fur and lumps of hot flesh and blood stick to Horik's face, blood splatters the collar of his polo shirt and something bitter floods his mouth, and Horik wakes with a sweet, syrupy taste in his mouth; the sun is shining at an angle through the window.

Conscious of the grinding noise of the city beyond the window, stupefied and dizzy, slowly putting one foot in front of the other, Horik made his way to the washbasin; an

eternity seemed to pass before his hand reached the bottom of the sink; something inside him was babbling, ruthlessly grinding up word after word, mumbling with a toothless mouth, but he wasn’t paying attention—or was he mistaking his defiance for the dread he was feeling; it struck him suddenly that he was looking at stone lions and balconies adorned with standing female figures made of alabaster; he thought he glimpsed Nilka in the distance—so skinny, her cheekbones sticking out prominently; Horik switched on the light, his smallest capillaries feeling the wires in the switch making contact; gradually his body slouched as if preparing to leap across a stream of water, and as he pulled his splayed hand out of the sink the sun inched across, its rays broken by his protruding fingers, and who knows why an image of a towering autumn sky dotted with little cottonball clouds stood before him; at that moment Horik was ready (as happens after sleep) to purge himself of the night terrors, but they remained inside him, stubbornly standing their ground; yet that did not scare him—on the contrary, he felt carefree; he looked at his fingers, stiff with weariness, a fleeting, viscid weariness; the clock chimed, as if for the last time, mincing the silence. Horik squinted so hard he saw bursts of sparks; his Adam’s apple bobbed up and down; his chest constricted, and he felt stabs of pain in his temples. He stuck his hand back into the water and felt the tender tickle of a heart-piercing chill: he watched as tiny bubbles formed along his skin and then popped. He raised his eyes and Maria Piskur’s gaze met his, but she understood nothing, because her own mind was beclouded; a surge of horror tore through her gullet like a pair of aggressive little animals and something inside her shuddered: at that moment Horik looked exactly like Mykhailo right before he died, except that his eyes shone with an even, frosty luster: two molten lead plates with tiny black dots of pupils. Maria jumped off the stool and cradled Sio-Sio’s head in her hands; his

mouth, wet with saliva, sought her bosom; old woman Piskur tried to shush his persistent, dark braying. Astonished, she heard singing from above—quiet, like the gurgling of a spring brook or the downpour of a cloudburst in May; confused, she stared at the high ceiling, not comprehending where the voices were coming from; but look, over there—she spotted a group of boys and girls aged five or six holding sheets of paper in their hands and singing in voices so fine, so pure: “Halia, my young Halia ...,” only to end abruptly, so that Sio-Sio’s bellowing was all there was. She got up on her swollen, festering legs, her eyes still fixed on Horik, who was leaning against the misty windowpane, watching the rain slicing off diagonal patches of autumn and washing the gray asphalt as screeching cars sped by and trees were dropping their leaves along its borders; suddenly it dawned on her: it was all over: all of it had flown past, all of it, this long life she had worked so hard to somehow paste together. A horrific howl broke loose from her sunken chest.

Despondent, the poor woman went out, rambling nonsensically, losing her footing down the grimy, sticky steps, breaking open the gangrenous abscesses on her legs; she quieted down after getting a view of the mountain of steps she had to climb down; at the bottom, on the street, under the ledge in front of the building by the cafeteria where, for “crazy money,” foreign tourists and students liked to drop in, she sat down on the wet bench and began bending finger after finger, counting up the years, figuring out how old Horik was, confusing him with his older brother. Sio-Sio thrust his face into her lap like a calf and crawled around in a puddle. Hour after hour passed; all at once she stood up, took her head in her hands, and wildly shrieking “Oh, my head, my head—help! I’m being devoured, the worms are eating me alive,” she tore off her blouse, as from every side she saw yellow worms the thickness of a human arm wriggling out and

crawling up her body; she crushed them underfoot and then waddled off, as if going to work, along the bleached-gray street, talking to passersby, seemingly mistaking them for someone else—but who knows, maybe they really were acquaintances of hers; after all, Stalinka was like a village, and in her mind all the clerks at the market were Mykhailo's lovers; wiping his hands on the startled passersby, Sio-Sio bellowed like a cow; he fell, crawled on his stomach, and got up, and, arms outstretched like a toy, holding the handle of a teapot handle in his big paws, he toddled onward behind Maria. At the fish store Rita Machinegunner pounced on Maria, yanking her hair and trying to bite her face; from behind Sio-Sio struck first one woman and then the other one with the teapot handle, wailing a wild, horrific "OO-OO-OO!!!" It started to drizzle; Maria left and roamed about, adrift in the wet, until morning; she was brought in from the street after somebody found her lying on the bare asphalt in front of a pub; Sio-Sio was standing over her, muttering strange, jumbled words in a language nobody understood. It was Major Syrovatko's people that brought her in. They drove her home in a fever and called for help. A young, dog-faced doctor arrived, the smell of cognac on his breath; he gave her an injection, and, rubbing alcohol into his hands, took note of her abscesses: "Has she had those long?" "Not so long," said Grandma Piskur, not liking what she was hearing and throwing up her hands, her frightened eyes darting back and forth. "Maybe a week." "Her blood has to be tested, right away," said the doctor and, pushing a fat needle into a vein, collected a full syringe of blood while Sio-Sio yelped at the top of his lungs. Leaving a bunch of prescriptions, the doctor went on his way. Maria lay in a dark corner, the same corner where Grandma Piskur always hung an icon that Grandpa would promptly remove; she lay there, breathing hard while quietly telling Mykhailo about everything that had happened to her, while swatting

at something in the air she was seeing through her clouded vision. An emergency vehicle drove up some five days later; orderlies in lab coats so grubby that they looked green laid Maria on a stretcher; apparently recovering her senses, she jerked her head up and yowled a long yowl; the orderlies carried her into the van and then stuck a thick sheet of paper in front of Grandma Piskur's face; flustered, the old woman broke out in a sweat as she put an "X" on the imposing "authorized document"; ignoring the orderlies, Horik stepped up and signed the document with unabashed flair; a young orderly, not much older than Horik, told him in a kindly manner that his mother—Horik's mother, that is—had syphilis and the entire family had to be tested, since it was a legal matter and if you refused you'd get hauled off in a halter. Horik scowled as a jumble of thoughts about justice and vengeance assailed him; vague visions of retribution, of bloody revenge, overcame him; imagining a reckoning, he could smell the blood and he saw black, but in the end the desire to settle scores trickled away, leaving him with a fierce rage in his heart; out there lay Stalinka, sprawled out in the late autumn afternoon, grieving in tune with the lamenting crows, reeking with the stench of disgusting corners and filthy walk-through courtyards, noisy with the sound of automobiles; a deceptive, early winter was setting in.

As fall was coming to an end, right around the October holidays, as a sullen sky bound into clusters of clouds stretched over the houses, as swarms of people, oblivious to all cares, incessantly chewing and drinking, intoxicated on just the prospect of three days off work, flocked everywhere—to the crowded, semi-dark stores, to the public washrooms, to the pubs where a *karbovanets* would get you a glass of wine or sometimes even a shot of *horilka*—in that end-of-fall moment, tinged with love and death, gray with the drizzle and mists that converged on Vasylkivska, wound up like a snake and clinging like a T-

shirt to everything between elegant buildings encircled by triple-high fences—that was when Vaska Glycerin, who lately hadn't been getting along with Mister Peps Mare's-Eye, vanished. And it wasn't because they were so different that they weren't getting along: Vaska Glycerin wore white or brightly colored motley pressed pants and a bright orange neckband; he occupied himself with so-called "pinching," which is to say that his job was to pick pockets in the metro and the commuter trains; he was a friendly, easy-going chap, which was why he was known as Glycerin; as for Peps, the "minister without portfolio under Klyk," he dressed exclusively in expensive Romanian suits, but that had begun recently, for before he had always dressed sloppily and enjoyed smoking weed. His taste for marijuana had brought him together with Inka, a girl from the Chabany suburbs, the daughter of well-to-do parents; she dabbled in selling it to students in the dormitories on Lomonosov St. She was nothing to fawn over: skinny legs, big round belly, as if pregnant, impossible to tell where her torso ended and her legs began; add to that the pimply face of a bony peasant, adorned with a flattering, run-of-the-mill, aspirationally white-toothed smile. Nonetheless, for Skull the only virtue of this white-lipped creature, brought down by her incessant pursuit of money, indistinguishable from dozens of other wan, repulsive girls, was that she was the daughter of prominent, wealthy parents and that she dressed in stylish and expensive clothes. Still, when Mister Peps Mare's-Eye suddenly decided to start a romance with Inka, the pimps and Nosach too voluntarily forewarned him: "Among us, Peps, you're like a lord, we've conferred so many monikers on you ... but show us your subordination: tread softly on sagging rafters, dude ...," which literally meant: do not, Mister Peps Mare's-Eye, stick your snout into someone else's trough; Inka (Skull's disastrous one-nightstand) made extra money by coordinating the flow of girls for the pimps: she'd pick up some over-painted

airhead with dreams of Alain Delon and white sailboats and marble staircases descending to the sea and a desire for “decent company and some fun with intelligent guys, not like here,” and then nonchalantly invite her to birthday parties or for a stroll in the country: “out there everything is just so exquisite—those people know how to live, not like our idiots!” The airhead’s mouth drops open, she believes what she hears yet doesn’t quite believe it; and then, after a bit of drinking, some names are dropped, like Pierre Cardin and Gerard Depardieu, with whom someone from their circle has drunk vodka, and if not with Gerard, then with Volodka Vysotskyi for sure. The airhead listens—where else would she hear anything like this—and when, in the middle of the night, she sobers up and shakes off the drunken stupor, she finds herself in bed with an Arab who curses and sends her, yesterday’s princess, out to brew coffee. Lying sprawled out in a bed stinking of musk and marijuana, feeling bad about something unspecified, she rams her face into the pillow and says over and over, “I’m dreaming, I’m dreaming!” Then, in the morning, there’s regret, moans, and the gnashing of teeth. It was generally too late, though: Inka had that rare talent of finding and picking up those girls who flung themselves into the flames recklessly and heedlessly; the worse things went for them, the more recklessly they destroyed themselves. Vaska Glycerin was lucky, though: fate dealt him a “joker,” and he was happy—fools don’t know any better. Getting to know Inka, Glycerin had to listen to her mind-numbing discourse on virtue, family, and cozy slippers; he watched her and yawned, as he let her passionate and endless talk about the importance of English-language courses in one ear and out the other—“It’s imperative to go abroad … here there’s nothing”—after which he’d pick her up and cart her off into the dormitory’s Lenin Room across from two overloaded garbage chutes; along the peeling, dilapidated hallway, with countless doors on both sides, illuminated with one

miserable little lamp, students shuffled along, throwing absent-minded glances at the skinny intertwined arms and legs that looked like the limbs of a dwarf tree: the half turns of the mingled bodies, the muffled noises, the kissing, rubbing, turning, and rolling, spiked with thin mosquito-like squeals; none of it was news to the students: a heap of half-naked bodies, impossible to differentiate arms and legs —two pairs of eyes probing the decrepit Lenin Room, decorated with rows of party leaders' portraits ensconced under imperfect blown glass and furnished with a mound of smashed chairs and dirty rotted mattresses, permeated with urine and mold; Inka laid herself out on a table top, thus hiding her nipples—her underdeveloped, juvenile breasts made her self-conscious; she slid around, raised herself on her elbows—"oh, that's no good," hid her diminutive bum, then stuck it out; taking mincing steps, Vaska Glycerin walked around to the left and to the right, not knowing how to approach her. Finally, Inka settled down on her back on top of some scattered, rumpled, and faded old "Communist Party Manifesto" brochures—a torn banner caught on her pointy knee; breathing hard and unhappily through her nose, she thrust forward her square chin, lightly bruised after a squeezing-out-pimples ritual, and biting her (even normally) pale, thin lip, she squealed like a bitch: this guy was her first, she had to suffer through this; who would ever think that she, Inka, such a clean and respectable girl who was saving herself for someone more worthy, would end up in the paws of this drug addict; why couldn't it be Klyk?... her thinking curved like an arc, overlaid with a thin veneer of disgust and despair: may this be the first and last time; she hated all the girls and women she knew: the ones with lovely legs, the legs of a doll, the just-right breasts and the perfect just-strong-enough thighs; she ground her teeth; an overloaded trash bin brimming with emerald green flies buzzed nearby; pools of ankle-deep red liquid, a combination of

food waste and sludge and the juices of thawed out calf meat, had trickled out and lay ankle-high; several Negroes were cooking kebabs, shashliks, or a Romanian-style roast over a grease-splattered gas stove while Inka and Glycerin frisked about in the shambles of furniture in the Lenin Room; grievous resentment spilled out of Inka's eyes like snake venom, a profound bitterness at how her long-held, precious dream of her first man was dissolving, like foam, right at that moment; brusquely Glycerin flung his body onto the bundle of flesh and bones whose name was Inka, having no idea how fortunate he was; after that moment, straightening out, just as her rawboned figure started to relax, her body convulsed, contorting her neck, engorging her jugular vein; her hand tore at his straw-colored hair and everything turned green for her: she gasped and panted as a current of astonishment ripped through her, and the pain vanished, dissolving in a languid wave of, mad passion—Inka squealed like an animal, flashing her pointy knees and jumped backward as if singed; and, conscious of what she had accomplished and aroused by it, agony and pleasure gushed out of her half-naked body, out of her open pale lips. Things became foggy for both of them: the walls, the ceiling, the doors, the beams, the portraits—all receded in a fog and a boundless pleasure seized them, warm waves of contentment washing over them; the Negroes' chattering outside the Lenin room, in the hallway, and in the rooms along the hallway put Glycerin on alert; it made him stop, quieted him, forced him to prick up his ears: all at once Inka jumped off and pulled in her stomach; her jutting ribs flashed in front of him; the folds around her loin shook; hungrily, like a filly, she drew in the dormitory's stench, which included her own scent, as if to pursue it: the two of them thrashed and wriggled even faster on top of a pile of newspapers, fresh brochures, and magazines studiously marked in with pencil, the banners rattled in the commotion. Inka got up; spasms warped her body; her

sweaty hands untwisted Glycerin's legs, furry with short hairs, and she fell to the floor on her pointy knees....

This was what Mesaib, the Moroccan Arab, saw when he, seemingly accidentally, opened the door a crack; that wasn't because the clamor he heard from the kitchen annoyed him—he didn't mind that at all: he was so horny and jealous that he felt as though a fly were buzzing his temples; Mesaib wasn't alone in desiring a white woman—and this was just his first year of study at the agricultural academy.

After that a veiled enmity between Mister Peps Mare's-Eye, the intrepid fighter, and Glycerin began. Vovka would enter the basement and remove his jacket, hanging it on a chair, meticulously matching seam to seam; Glycerin, comfortable on the musty mattresses and puffing on an aromatic Marlboro, taking sips of beer to enhance his enjoyment, would lick his thick lips (was that a smile on his lips, or was he sneering?) and cast inscrutable looks at Skull as he squirmed like a worm under his deadpan gaze: you couldn't tell what was hiding behind that opacity; a bleached white collar with mismatched stripes reflected his greenish face; Mister Peps Mare's-Eye can't take it any more: he gives in, crumbles, and erupts in outbursts: "Don't you look at me like that—or I'll bust your skull. Stop looking at me, Glycerin," as Glycerin takes a delicious drag on his cigarette, blows out rings of smoke, and begins to narrate a long story about Inka, telling it in soft, drawn-out tones, as if revisiting what took place; Skull beats his fists into his thighs, and, hunched over, runs crazily around the basement while Glycerin keeps his eyes on him and rambles on and on about Inka: what she looked like yesterday, what she wore on Wednesday or Friday; and, clearing his throat Peps can't hold back: "Let's go, Glycer—let's slug it out," but Klyk cooled them both down, punching them in the chest and saying "A broad's not worth it"—Moidodyr gazed at him and gave him a strange look,

one that was supposed to communicate a message: the significance of this state of affairs cannot be exaggerated; it was a malicious, wicked look, his eyes flittering like a rat's.

They stood like that for a good minute, stupidly blinking at each other, and Horik saw that Skull was pleased; as for Horik, things like that were beyond him; he was still a virgin, he hadn't had a woman. What he did understand, though, was this: those comments applied not only to the brigade but to him, Horik—they were meant to destroy something, to demonstrate superiority.

It was he, Mister Peps Mare's-Eye, who brought the news that Vaska Glycerin had vanished: disoriented by the October frost, walking unsteadily after a casual shot of vodka, all sleeked up with brilliantine like a rat, his face pockmarked with bluish scars from past pimples, he was all spruced up in a gray coat and a pair of white pants rich with coffee stains; at that time the guys in the brigade were sipping rancid, bitter beer; through narrow, egg-shaped windows split in half by the asphalt poured a milky pre-winter twilight, and in that whitish-gray, lilac-toned autumn air, sleepy janitors, stone-drunk in their grubby smocks, walked back and forth, scoring the pavement clean with their short brooms; carrying an accordion under his arm and wearing his precious round sunglasses, the blind Sanych arrived at 4:45. Ninka Kryvoruchkova was putting a creaky, made-in-China wicker chair next to the in-wall heater where pinkish blood had seeped through last year as it leaked down from the floor above, where the butchering and the selling of meat took place; Ninka Kryvoruchkova picked up a rag, and, balking, cocked her head anxiously—from upstairs the sounds of bones breaking and wet meat being slapped could be heard, followed by the cadenced drone of a conversation keeping pace with the rhythm of the carcasses' skinning and deboning; a month after the death of Nikandrych, a radiator that roared like a jet

engine was dragged in—the heater of old was sealed off with clay: the brown stain remained for a long time, and the trickling of blood from above never stopped; poisoning the air with its caustic odor, it oozed lymph-like onto the red tin plating that covered the floor by the giant range; the odor would settle in right around noon, melding in with the curses the drunks and butchers yelled out; a dense vapor hung heavily, like viscid clay, absorbing the smell of the fresh blood and the tobacco smoke: as usual, Ninka Kryvoruchkova brought Sanych a shot of vodka; tossing it down in a single gulp, Sanych said “Thank you—went down smooth as a lie,” pulled the leather straps of the accordion over his shoulders, and sent his virtuoso fingers flying across the keys as he sang along, jarringly and out-of-tune, to songs like “The Danube’s Waves,” “Seven Forty,” and “The Beer-Barrel Polka.”

Sipping sour beer, the brigade half-listened to Skull’s prattle: Skull had the runs and after every few words had to dash off; his pockmarked, scarred face had a green pallor; his caved-in eye sockets made it seem like black hollows in a human skull gaped at the interlocutor; Wolf, with stifled pleasure, his lips curved in silent delight, watched as Skull’s banged-up face transformed to assume a monstrous visage and expression; he clumsily tore off chunks of dried fish, admiring his pink, girly fingernails; he chucked the scrappy pieces of pink salmon into his mouth, his pearly white teeth chewing on them unenthusiastically, and licked his colorless (though nicely shaped) lips; the brigade sat around the same table where Nikandrych, Paul the Peacock (a thug from an adjacent neighborhood), and Noodle had enjoyed wasting many an evening together, Noodle always running over to whisper something into the ears of the woman behind the counter and Nikandrych intent on listening: his old acquaintances were sharing pieces of information in hushed tones among themselves; they knew Nikandrych was waiting for the higher-ups to

signal when they would start using their big axes to break and smash pig skulls; Sanych stretched out the bellows of his accordion while Nikandrych slurped thick (like lubricating oil) tea, fanned out his nostrils, raised his chin a bit, and smiled a crooked smile, just as Horik was doing now; Horik was also recalling Nikandrych's left hand, the one with the cherry-colored scar; its color had gradually deepened to purple, and the scar itself had swelled; after a while, a festering sore had formed on that spot; it would eventually open up like the petals of a flower, yellow at first and shedding a colorless gooey fluid, in the end turning brown with green cracks. Nikandrych would dab it with a handkerchief—he had a bottomless supply of them, and, once one got saturated with puss he'd throw it to the floor; a heap of handkerchiefs lay on the floor—small ones, white ones, yellow ones, brown ones, like a collection of butterfly wings; the old thug was partial to white handkerchiefs; during those hours the butchers upstairs performed their job with exaggerated zeal, chopping through the calf and pig bones more ferociously and more determinedly; Sanych squeezed the bellows, forcing out raspy, fitful sounds; completely off beat, he screeched the Marc Bernes song "Cranes"; the threesome stood motionless; for as long as they stood around like that, the people in the basement buzzed quietly among themselves, pulling in their heads into their shoulders, their eyes scanning the tables, trying not to meet Nikandrych's immovable cold gaze; and Horik thought of that old thug's watery, beet-red (like his sore) eye, its incurable mounting infection: virulent secretions filling it up faster every day, the eye ready to pop out from under his receded simian brow; the sore on his hand had stopped shedding fluid and no longer seeped blood, instead twitching with green, compacted puss; Horik was finishing up his beer; he felt tipsy, light-headed, fired up with self-love. Piskariov pretended to be listening to Skull's prattle but was in fact full of apprehension and profound sadness;

it wasn’t Glycerin Mister Peps Mare’s-Eye that he was concerned about, he was there to wheedle the guys into joining him in a scheme of some kind; Horik dropped his head and ran his scarred fingers, greased with fish oil, across his crown; raising his head, he said, “Let’s have a drink ... then we’ll think of something,” although it looked like he didn’t know what he was saying. Skull kept chattering about Inka, Nilka, Mesaib; with that last name, ears perked up—“Dirty Sultan”; on the other side of the windows birds heavy as lead tumbled down, and heavily they rose, flapping their wings, rolling their bodies toward the invisible horizon behind the buildings; Horik raised his head as if listening intently; his disjointed thoughts focused on Nikandrych; to hell with Nikandrych, and anyway who was he, really? a bright glimmer: Glycerin, Mesaib, Nilka; the sounds coming from the accordion, an off-pitch tango, animated those present; Sanych stomped his foot to the beat, the pointed tips of his battered “Winstons” scattering the blood-soaked sawdust; casting a sharp look around, Horik made a wry face; in his mind he was adding two plus two, but somehow his mulling things over wasn’t working: nothing made sense, helter-skelter thoughts rattled in his head like peas in a pod—Sultan, Nosach, Mesaib, Nilka; he saw an image of Sio-Sio’s dim-witted physiognomy on a sliced-off movie frame floating across a yellow chasm; the off-pitch chords Savych played climbed ever higher; the cacophony sounded like nails scratching glass. People puked, ejecting cascades of an unrefined “dragon,” a drink Maria Piskur had invented: a mix of tea, homebrew, and a quarter-portion of store-bought vodka; a plump Botsman, his skin a sickly pink, followed everything with his lascivious gaze; after snorting cocaine, he scampered off for some vodka; Horik sat, huddled against a chair, picturing the groove in Nilka’s back that gently merged into the round halves of her bum, and the way she swung her buttocks as she walked on the opposite side of

Vasylkivska Street in her school uniform, holding an ice cream cone and licking it strangely, all dressed up in pink bows and white lace. And at sundown he would see a glimmer of her tender fragile form in the window, hunched over a book, lying there in her pink cotton briefs, her plump elbow supporting a cheek, her ash-colored hair hanging loose; he was sure he could smell her sweat, her body, her Scheherazade perfume. But his memory was still swirling in a black abyss, rubbing against basement windows; there was nothing, his only memory was Sultan–Nilka–Mesaib–Nosach–Inka; like an animal he smelled danger but, bound in some kind of mulish fatalism, he felt completely indifferent; his heart sank, Sanych played an off-pitch, saccharine tango, the tacky lights burned through the windowpanes, and suddenly Horik yelled out in a drawn-out hoarse cry: “More vodka! Vodka! Vodka!”; the cry rose in a whirling mass, the drunks quieted down, in the air even the raggedy green tobacco smoke stood still; only the butchers upstairs kept cursing nonstop, smashing apart the frozen bones and carcasses; Horik got up—he thought he saw a man looking at him out of the filthy and moldy corner, from under the sagging hoods of cobwebs: two green eyes shone feverishly; “That’s Nosach’s work,” someone threw in; for some reason, Skull stiffened; his eyes sank ever deeper into the darkness of his soul. A fawning Botsman set out a bottle; they drank shot after shot, puffing out blue smoke; bluntly and casually Horik stretched out a hand and got up —who knows why, or to whom he had stretched out his hand; pleasant swells of intoxication enveloped him; alcohol moved the blood inside Sanych’s deadened veins; Sanych glanced at Horik through his sunglasses and waved his hand as if protecting himself from a blow; Horik grew afraid, and before long everyone noticed Horik’s complexion turning white and then blue—that handsome, pleasantly-arranged face with perfectly-chiseled features, a perfect profile. He turned his head sharply, swept the

surroundings with a dark and unseeing (as if in the middle of the night) gaze; the alcohol burned his innards and bitter saliva washed his gums, emptying something from inside him; again, Horik stretched out his hand, trying to grasp something invisible; in a surprisingly quiet and calm voice he said: “To Lomonosov Street. To Lomonosov Street. Let’s see who will end up on top.” “Yes, yes, yes,” Mister Peps Mare’s-Eye instructed. “Revenge for Glycerin.” “You fucking moron, you ass—why are you protecting him!”

For the first time in his life there was no fear or trembling in Redistributor’s heart when he peered into the deep chasms of Skull’s eyes—this was probably what boosted Horik’s confidence; the sun hadn’t yet dropped behind the strings of buildings; a biting wind drove decaying leaves along the road for the last time, rocking the grimy streetlight; pre-winter strips of color mottled the sky; below the ground lay idly under the sky; the brigade lifted their faces toward the last rays of the autumn sun; their jackets and coats rustled as they clambered on foot between rows of yellow-red buildings, their faces silently reflected in the shop windows; along the way their numbers grew but they walked on, because a taxi was too expensive; Horik took in the whole of Stalinka as if for the first time; something solid and impervious, like the walls of dwellings, hardened in his chest; in whiplashes of wind droves of listless pedestrians scurried forward like the curved stalks of weeds; overhead low-lying red clouds tore on ahead; a blazing yellow orb hung suspended in the sky, making everyone squint uncomfortably; their strides sometimes merged, then diverged; fence boards crackled as they were torn off; uncorked bottles of cheap wine passed hand to hand; like a rotten old boat, the city softly sank into the purple twilight; the spire atop the Agricultural Exhibition building pierced the evening sky before fading from view; clouds leaned over the flat plates of rooftops; the air became dense and heavy, as if Holosiiv was being sheltered

within the palms of hands; the flow of people dwindled, and those who remained, the ones heading toward Lomonosov Street, quieted down: they streamed along the gray concrete walls of the campus, along the rows of shops housed in miserable hovels, their neon lights sputtering until closing; staggering through the bare apple orchard, trailing puffs of exhaled vapor, the brigade approached the red walls of the dormitories; Botsman and Redistributor were sent out first, and the latter, creeping under the windows, slithered like a snake up onto a balcony; heavily exhaling vapor, the brigade quieted; sucking “Kazbek” cigarettes, they watched as the dark and hook-nosed figure, rumpled and stooped over, disappeared, its shaky outline discernable for a final time as it moved in front of the faded red bricks; the rooks clustered in the limbs of a tree looked like wet rags; it started to drizzle, shadows curled up and disappeared, the streetlights licked the charcoal of the sky; a bang; people shuddered; sensing the presence of dumb strangers, the rooks flapped their wings, lamenting and clicking their lacquered beaks; Vovka Redistributor sent out a signal—three short whistles—and one after the other the guys in the brigade pulled themselves up over the rails of the balcony and snuck into the dormitory: Skull, also known as Mister Peps Mare’s-Eye, and Street Musician, and Moidodyr, served as leader; Vovka Redistributor’s lips twitched nervously as he cut through the telephone wire—that wire had been used to fasten the door to the office where the administrator was snoring; outside, all skin and bones, the dogs barked; Horik turned his head, listening hard, trying to identify the sounds: Botsman and Redistributor were banging quietly on a door. A square of light dislodged a bit of the darkness from the hallway; Nosach’s face poked out, and without knowing who was there, he said “Yes”; instantly Skull put his foot in the door. Nosach tried to call out to someone, but Redistributor rammed his fist into his jaw; all five men burst into the

room, where two more of Nosach's pals, Chechens, were smoking weed. Politely the Chechens stood up and got busy chewing spearmint gum; Peps started acting bullish, which was not a good sign; reassuringly he said, "Let's chew," and then head-butted first one and then the other one, knocking them over. Nosach was punched and kicked down onto his knees; his hands were tied to a bed: in a measured rhythm Redistributor pummeled him in the chest, growling, "You've taken care of yourself nicely, but where's our little Sultan?" "Stop groveling. Where's Sultan? And who set Glycerin on fire?" Botsman smashed the chandelier with a mop; cigarette lighters were flicked on to dispel the darkness; a noose was fastened to a hook; Botsman struck his cigarette lighter again and again, beating Nosach in the chest and anywhere else every time it flamed up—a sniveling Nosach smeared the slob all over his face. Spitting out his teeth, he did in the end blabber: "Upstairs they'll know ... it's his people up there, his broads, his whores, ... it hurts," Nosach wailed like a child; "What's the room number, asshole?" "Six-hundred five."

"The main thing is to scream, kiddo—scream. Screaming at the top of your lungs is the most important thing"—those words spoken by Nikandrych flickered in Horik's mind; clinging to that directive, he flew headlong through the long dormitory hallway, slipping on banana peels, breathing the heavy air, bitter with musk and the commingled fumes of marijuana and classy cigarettes; the rush of the hard-hitting, dense odor of garbage, the drumbeat of voices, the indistinct chatter in a foreign language disconcerted Wolf; he froze in front of the door; he'd wanted to smash it open or to break it down, but his skin broke out in goose bumps; he stopped, stung; the brigade came together, pale with the barely-concealed terror they were feeling, that profound terror; spasms jogged their muscles, twisted their joints; a distant train rumbled through the darkening night; the door cracked and opened; using his shoulder, Piskariov

leaned against the doorjamb: a bitter ball of saliva irritated the roof of his mouth; a surge of passion blazed through him, from his testicles to his heart; his skull felt like someone had lifted the top and snapped it open; straining to see ahead, he made out pinkish-white smudges bobbing up and down, an astonishing proliferation of purple smears; and Mister Peps Mare's-Eye a/k/a Skull a/k/a Street Musician a/k/a Moidodyr watched his team leader's face harden, watched it become the face of a man who has lost everything on earth, and Skull, choking in a fusion of chaotic, stifling laughter and ecstasy, cried out, "Ahush!" and the snow-white, pink smudges assumed the contours of faces; something popped out of the room: "Get out of here! Get o-o-out of he-r-r-re!"; a wide-eyed Negro got up and stood over something disheveled, bushy, and long-legged, something surprisingly recognizable and intimately familiar, and in the orange glow of a night light Horik saw Nilka—breasts aroused, the brown nipples hard, her face hidden in an ashen mess of hair; to the right of her, the buns of her buttocks spread, ready for penetration, the fiery, red-haired Nadka shook her voluptuous body—"Shut the door, assholes!" the purple Negro kept repeating over and over, driving the awful stench of sweat forward—"Get out of here ... out!" "OK, Skull, let him have it!" With a big windup, Mister Peps Mare's-Eye, a/k/a Skull, a/k/a Moidodyr, a/k/a Street Musician swung a hydraulic rubber hose—the Negro's body coiled and flew through the air like a hoop; he shrieked; astoundingly, his tight chrome skin turned inside out, exposing raspberry-colored flesh; spurts of blood shot out onto the sheets, across the white jalousie blinds; it splattered flowery designs over the walls, ran down the patterned dormitory glasses—"ay-ay-ay"—the deep-set eyes slashed with fine cuts filled with awareness; leaning on her slender arm, the veins a pale blue, the fingernails dotted with nail polish, Nilka lifts herself up; she rises, the velvety skin on her back unrolling ever so slowly;

so ordinary, this getting up; the Negro, the one beating Nadka's bum with a wide belt, grabs a knife, but Piskariov thrashes the Negro with a blow that lands him on the bed; Skull growls and, infuriated, moves away; fury ripping his throat, he inflates his chest like a bullfrog's; hooting triumphantly, he pummels the purple Negro covered in raspberry syrup; the Negro shuddered, raking the carpet with his fingers; the rest of them rushed out to get to the hallway, slipping away from the glow of the night lights—the purple, lilac Africans darkening, becoming chocolate-hued, coffee-colored and then black; their deep, primal wailing can still be heard in the room, as well as the smack of fenceboards on hands, heads and backs; Nilka rises naked, right in front of Horik, facing him, slim-waisted, with firm thighs; Horik remembers the grimy, filthy dawns of bygone days; a shove to his shoulder brings him back to reality: in a corner, in the jumble of white and black bodies, stands a man swaying and hiding behind a veil, his face paper-white, his eyes looking like green stars; the toothless mouth on the stranger's head opens, utters something incomprehensible, "Da-a-dabu-da," and vanishes. Horik sees lips that look like a torn flower: slowly he winds a bicycle chain around bruised knuckles, across the entire palm of his hand and around the wrist, spitting out the bitter globs of saliva in his mouth and licking his lips, his heart pounding frantically in his chest; Nilka sits down on the arm of a sofa and speaks in that voice, that voice …, as when he watched her brush her ashen hair, lying in the construction cart, walking along the other side of the street; he wants to call out but the red flashes blazing before his eyes stop him: his head, the underside of his skin, is crawling with ants; Skull is bellowing, delivering the final blows to the brilliantine-groomed pimp Rozik; Nilka casts concerned glances, as though watching a small animal; Horik rubs a chain against his chin; in the hallway Skull is dragging Inka by the hair—naked calculating bitch

with a big pussy: “The whore—watch it, Klyk! The cops!”—the lights in the corridor flicker feebly, wet branches lash the windowpanes; the sun has vanished, seemingly forever; Negroes pour out of all the rooms, wailing, hurling empty bottles, running off to a safe distance, yelling “Police police police!”; bits of rounded glass looking like the backs of little animals twinkle from the floor; slick pools of blood glisten; pieces of torn clothing and chunks of stucco litter the floor; in retreat, the brigade is swinging pieces of rusted rebar, crushing collarbones, noses, arms, and legs; the tar-black throng rolls back, spilling down the steps; the Negroes hiding on the other floors crawl back to their rooms, the clicks of door locks the only sound; suddenly Skull, Moidodyr, and Mister Peps Mare’s-Eye, Street Musician are hollering in one sustained tone, “We’re under siege, Klyk! We’re surrounded. We’re betrayed! These aren’t cops. They’re Sultan’s people ...”—and a purple fist has already torn into Peps’s face, knocking him off his feet, a dozen feet are tramping over him—“Motherfucker,” “betrayal, betrayal,” “the voice perfectly relaxed, unaffected; swinging the hydraulic hose, Klyk made his way to Inka—“You bitch, just getting acquainted, huh?”—grabbed her by the hair and dragged her to the exit; the smack of a fenceboard, like a pop of gunfire, scatters pieces of clay and plaster; chalk dust rises in limp, scrawny puffs; a swirl of people chokes, roiling, gurgling; the Negroes scurry off like rats, and Piskariov’s people mix in with Sultan’s people: “Someone has paid for our betrayal!”—a blackness whirled and grunted outside the windows; a blow, another one, and another; blood seeps over a shirt, splashing across Inka’s naked back; it feels like the end; scorching heat burns nostrils, parches throats, the stench of burning impedes breathing; sleet batters the windowpanes; in the air the constant residue of musk and almonds, and the voices of the Africans: “abu-ababub-bbbuuu”; pigeons perching along the window ledges, rising

in flight, exploding in bright white comets; at the end of the hallway Skull waves a kitchen knife, his body jerking around like a puppet's against a yellow square background; "betrayal betrayal betrayal"; the air outside dense and cold; empty bottles whizz out of windows; the Negroes are jabbering "abu-ababub-bbbuuu" as band after band of noisy rooks settle on the aspens, take flight, then alight, again and again; Wolf, a/k/a Klyk, a/k/a Horik gathers the guys together and, knocking down whatever they encounter, they break through to the boiler, closer to the bare apple orchard.

First to break the silence was Redistributor; snorting through his nose he threw out a word here and there, as if hurling pebbles: "What's wrong with you, Klyk. That's what betrayal is all about." They were sitting on the windy side of the stop where buses 38, 80, and 84 arrived and departed; the light in the clattering lampshade drifted languidly in the breeze. The jittery edges of their shadows went from broken to smooth and then vanished; from the direction of Syrets the city blazed in an intense red glow; Mister Peps Mare's-Eye cursed; the quiet cough of a car engine was heard in one of the deep courtyards; Peps cursed again as he chased away a pregnant bitch with a drooping belly; her teats rubbed against the pavement as she wound around the three pairs of shoes. Peps struck her hard under the belly: the bitch let out a drawn-out, tedious yowl and trotted away, dragging her behind under an arch into the dark; close by a car appeared; a white shaft of light skidded across walls, windowpanes, fences; a bright, bursting bloom of fire ripped through the humid air with a bang: Redistributor roared out "oooh-oooh-oooh," shouting in a strangely inhuman voice, and Klyk saw him fly through the air, pulling up his knees and then straightening out, floating in the air for a second and then falling lifeless to the ground; his stiff arms, jerking involuntarily, clanked against a metal rail—and then he was still; Horik and Skull

lowered their eyes, and when their gaze met the ground, Vovka Redistributor, son of pharmacist Moses Abramovych Buscholz, seventeen years old, already lay in a puddle, brightly illuminated, a cold rain falling straight into his open mouth; the tiles on the single-story shop reflected the red lights; the car, having traversed lawns and sidewalks, was disappearing from view at the end of Vasylkivska Street. Skull breathed hard: “What was that Klyk? What? What? Him and us, we …”; the bitch trotted up to slurp from the puddle in which lay Vovka Buscholz, who would forever remain Vovka Redistributor; Piskariov leaned over and picked her up by the scruff of her neck—she must have been hungry, since she was lapping up the bloody water; “They killed him … Got him right in the head … Can’t see his eyes …” Skull spat out; the bitch’s back shuddered in fine ripples; she nipped Horik’s hand lightly and dragged her body over to the fence, her front paws pattering; Skull, a/k/a Mister Peps Mare’s Eye, suddenly found his voice: “I know, she’s homeless.” Licking where the bitch had bit him, through the hair flopping over his eyes, Horik looked toward Stalinka rising out of a pink mist.

And then he ran: from the opposite end of the city came a red glow, imperceptibly turning brown. He ran surprisingly fast, faster than usual, but to him it felt like he was caught stock still, standing upright in the rubbery half-light: the buildings, the cafes, the movie theaters, all of them were stuck together in the darkness. But downtown the city looked as if it had been set on fire from below … He ran beneath the quadrangular blocks of windows, fluid and nimble and pushing his bare chest into the wind, choking on his own words, incomprehensible cries rising from his chest—fragments of phrases, the beginnings and endings of words; the rain continued; Horik felt a burbling in his bowels: the wind quieted down, playing halfheartedly with the roof tiles. Inside he was burning; the foaming and hissing of his lips muffled the noise in his bowels. His mind

was frazzled. He squatted by the wall of a department store at the start of Chervonoarmiiska Street, not far from a tiny, cozy second-hand bookstore; a fighter aircraft roared overhead, leaving behind a velvety trail. Here a dense, acidic, and oily haze of coffee hung in the air almost the whole night. Cold clumps of meaningless human chatter dropped down on him. Swaying, he took a breath; his shaky, detached gaze wobbled across the low-lying sky corroded with red. He spat underfoot; the twilight bled faintly, stubbornly creeping up the buildings; rising, it blended with the noise overhead; his teeth hurt intolerably; looking for a place to pee, he felt out the space around him with his feet; something like a thought sped through his mind; its fine tentacles pried into his veins and scratched around with invisible wire twines: he wasn't thinking of running away; he was just ambling on, in complete darkness, trying to convince himself: What the hell do I need Glycerin for, or Vovka Redistributor—has-beens with no sense. And suddenly he felt a bolt of electricity, as if a tiny door to the world had cracked open: Mister Peps Mare's-Eye, who, squirming and wriggling, was trying so hard to replace Glycerin in the brigade: he had made that clear right in front of Glycerin, there in the cellar he had said that Nilka was a bitch, but said it so cleverly that Horik got it only now. His thinking quickened, something pleasurable raced through him from the top of his head to his groin; the sky took on an orange tint then faded in the frost; the wind rustled, scattering the last wet leaves stuck to the windows of the kiosks where tram tickets were sold; gusts ripped the tattered posters; the walls of the buildings drew closer; the quiet rumble of train cars squealed ever more persistently on the rails, as if tearing flesh, and shooting streams of blue sparks that tore apart the snug silence. Piskariov caught sight of a small figure in a window, someone's wife, a graceful, fragile figure, a tremulous spot of mercury; the train cars were closer now,

grinding the air, and Horik burst out in demented laughter: to die, like Nikandrych, of syphilis, to die every morning puking out your silicate-infused lungs, destroyed by the People's Rubber Factory; clumps of steam rose with every turn of the wheels, settling in dirty red strips over the windows and ribbed, crooked walls of the hotel; frightened birds fell off the rooftops like stones; puffing hard, the train cars hammered on, roiling the air; he wanted that woman on the other side of the pink window—he was tantalized, he desired her, he was flustered and confused; the drumming of the wheels stimulated his desire—"the kid has started to think"—pornographic black-and-white images glimmered like little wings in his memory: long-legged beauties—in that memory known as childhood—and Wolf mashed his teeth, crying out into the black mass of buildings: "Autumn! Autumn! Autumn!" and suddenly broke off; he ran—from Nikandrych, from Redistributor, from Glycerin, past the windows shuttered with blinds behind which green parrots jabbered and clever people slept, chockfull of wine, beer, and fine Ceylon tea, stuffed, like money bags, with good will; but all of it mere bubbling, mere froth, because: he was Wolf Piskariov.

Still, his slobbering sorrow was stifling; behind him a scurry of human shadows; even without turning his head he could see them: some Negroes and young women in brand new Volvos; a few of them gesturing with two fingers to hail a taxi….

Wrapped in a stiff leather jacket he arrived at hairy-lipped Marfa's well past midnight. Things seemed to have cleared up in his head; the dog, seeing Horik, curled up its tail; with dimmed eyes it sauntered about lazily on its chain. Horik knocked on the windowpane with stiff fingers, once, twice, three times and then banged on it with his fist. Marfa appeared and confronted Horik right at the door: "What do you want? There's no vodka—no vodka." The square of light behind her delineated her twisted form and

her arms, bare to the elbow; it pained Horik to look at the light: “Let me in, old woman, I’m not looking for vodka ...” Marfa really did not want any visitors. “Let me in—it’s me, I’m Maria Piskur’s son ...” “Oh, my goodness, Horik—come on in, they’ve been searching and searching for you ...,” said the old woman, and unlocked the door from the inside; using his whole body Horik pulled himself through the doorway toward where voices, with the smell of fermented brandy mush drifted out; he glanced over his shoulder, to the left, across the whorls of black space that would be oozing and blistering, until morning, as Marfa obligingly pulled up a chair for Horik. “Here, a stool for you ... We were falling off our feet, we were so tired, looking for you, because your brother Sio-Sio strangled Grandma and set the place on fire—thank goodness the firemen came ...” “Tell me, tell me my fortune ...” “I’ll reveal such scenarios to you, such scenes ...”; his clouded gaze met her leaden eyes; with a sense of urgency she brought over a glass —“Here, snap out of it”; “I want a girl, the one called Sveta, I’ll pay you later”; with the edge of her hand hairy-lipped Marfa brushed a brown mixture off her elbows—“Why are you standing there, let’s have a drink then. Just sit here a minute.... Your mother ...” “Don’t nag me, old woman, I’ll pay later!” “Wait here a minute!” ‘Those aren’t our voices, must be banabaks, yeah, fucking banabaks, for sure’ thought Horik; but hairy-lipped Marfa was already back, “Let’s go, she’s been free for a while already—you’re in luck.” The two of them entered a darkened room. The switch snapped and the glow of a nightlight, like a lettuce-green string of beads, flowed out of a corner from under a picture of a seascape; something inside Horik tensed up, as if recalling a memory; he even stepped up to the window, but that familiar dread of dark windows stopped him and he went over to the bed, where in a plain knitted bathrobe, pink and trimmed with white flowers along the edges, all white and sweet, fragrant with family and home, sat Sveta,

the same Sveta the gang liked to watch as she walked along on the other side of the street; she put her arms around him as if he were family and her warm meaty lips covered his mouth; he didn't realize when it happened, but when they woke up the next morning they saw the first snow to have fallen and writhing black serpents that were crawling over it, all the way to the rim of a ravine: countless serpents, black and slimy, swiftly slithering off the hedges, swishing across the snow, and vanishing without a trace; Svetka took Horik's hand and put it over her mouth; for some reason it filled him with rage; he began to slap her across her full, warm lips; someone tapped him on the shoulder; Svetka squealed, "Ooh, my Sultan ..." Hairy-lipped Marfa immediately put away the spoons and razors; Sultan sat down and swung one leg over the other, while behind him a toadying Botsman, holding something apparently heavy, couldn't keep still; baring his teeth, Sultan took off a glove: "Do it"; and out rolled Mr. Peps Mare's Eye's head, like a head of cabbage, and then... Sultan's lips moved: "Listen, we have to talk, you and me ...," and they walked out onto the white snow; it blew in from the east; a cowering Svetka stayed behind on the cot, whimpering and rubbing off the blood on her lip while trying to make out what the men were saying; but as if to spite her, Marfa turned on the tape player and a spirited march filled the air: "And off I go, marching through the streets of Moscow." It snowed and snowed.

It was sometime around the beginning of spring that Jonah thought he saw a white, sun-warmed wall, when the snow, black and tired, lay in the sun like the carcass of a large dead bird, spreading a mild odor of humus; he felt an urge to inspect the premises, to walk through the house and yard, when it suddenly occurred to him that a fog had rolled in—a white mixture seemingly diluted with milk; the fog tightened its grip; Jonah stirred—his sense of

weightlessness surprised him; overhead a rustle like a pigeon’s wings hinted at something ineffable and gentle, as if someone were singing a soothing, sad song; Jonah still managed to see mute faces and a thatched roof; the train station hissed in the slush, hundreds of heels clicking; above, warmed by the pale sunlight, the dome glowed; again Jonah was hallucinating: something dog-like was grabbing him from behind and casually squeezing his whole back in its teeth; men and women appeared puppet-like in the steamy air, sitting themselves down, making themselves comfortable, chewing on sandwiches brought from home, as if they were fated to endure an eternity here at the train station; how Jonah’s presence in this boiling cauldron of humanity would end no one could predict; Jonah thought to himself, “Even the rain is probably soundless, certainly the drops falling on the roof, on this inverted Roof, are soundless, as they thump and recede, the rains drumming out something. Thumping and receding.” Then he relented and lost track—of fragments of events, of little islands of memory, little boomerangs, all united and glued together yet forever divided; at break of day, he was unbearably thirsty; ever more people were walking through—why were they there, where were they headed, spinning their webs of futility—from love to hate, or the other way around? Perhaps all traces of that have gone cold, and there he was, returning from somewhere, worn out with hunger and lice, his joints cramped; it was near Tambov that Jonah first glimpsed himself in a mirror, “an island, my green island”; the train station absorbed half the available light; the gloom drew people in, swept them up and sucked them in, men and women jerking their small paws around as if they were wound-up mechanical toys: fat-assed, voluptuous wenches sat on bollards where trinkets of all kinds were displayed on glass; people on benches, information boards, sluggish cops at a table—“Ya know, Petia, I gave it to that bitch, right up her tail, yesterday”—Jonah moved his mouth

and turned his head as if he hadn’t heard, but then maybe it hadn’t reached him; he heard nothing—only when a bell tolled, first one with a resounding peal, then another soft and delicate, and then other bells filled the air, and still others ripped apart the silky midday lethargy dotted with black flies buzzing lazily and stitched together with bunches of dirty pigeons. Cautiously, Jonah took it all in: the city, the city, the city … “He who has not seen the light has not been in the dark,” “He who has lived in the dark has seen the light”; he had no urges, as if he’d been picked clean inside; it’s good that way, he felt soft and compact, sort of like the small rubber ball a little girl was bouncing around: bounce, bounce, bounce …; and that man over there and this man right here, and that man there. A stranger was watching. People who have gone through a lot watch like that. And those who have experienced power and a woman’s love. Who have tasted hatred and murder. And love. Passionate love that is scorching hot, like the sun in August. Or a love like the salt in water when one is thirsty on a hot day. Those eyes are watching as if ready to pour it out, get rid of it, no matter what the price. Jonah took a deep breath. Slowly, considering his every step, Horik walked along the side of the station that glowed red; Jonah’s gray half-shut eyes were glued to the man with the pierced pupils; Jonah didn’t know why he couldn’t stop looking, he just couldn’t…; before this Jonah had lived in a place in the Podil owned by a man with sun-burned fingernails and a shock of completely white and silky hair; paintings cluttered his studio; strangers dropped by every day—all kinds, big shots and smaller fry—who completely ignored both the artist and Jonah; they yelled out their enthusiasm while women fluttered about, lapping up champagne: “Bastards,” the man whose name Jonah had forgotten would murmur—he’d get out only to come back just before dark, withered, angry, and always hungry—“Got anything to eat?” Jonah lay on the sofa, staring at the

ceiling and listening to the sharp, drawn-out squeal pinging across the windowpanes, echoing in the courtyards, breaking up the silence as an invisible streetcar crawled through the darkness “around midnight,” while the man on the other side of the thin partition, stripped of his former fears, reflected on the past, expecting nothing good of the future; only the nerve spanning Jonah’s heart throbbed on that clammy night, beating out random phrases: “These are the streets I wandered, asking myself who can say ‘no’ to death—certainly only you alone can, for choosing between good and evil is our destiny.” The Podil was awash in filth: pretty blond prostitutes, full of romantic fire, paraded along sidewalks caked with spittle, the wrinkles around their mouths obscured by the soft shadows; they hadn’t been broken yet, they still had their youth; and the man on the other side of the partition sat opposite the window, combing his hair, full of determination to start a new life this very morning—“How can you live like this, Jonah?”—only to return every evening, steeped in the stench of the passageway, his drunk eyes darting around the studio as he recounted his day; a dark haze advanced, the dogs’ whining sounding ever closer; the rooks flew off blocking the moon, and a voice said, “You have seen in order not to see”—a man with eyes nearly bursting with madness was sharing something about love with Jonah: a story about a yellow train station. The Minsk Station: under silver shafts of light he saw a girl running, straw flowers in hand, hair the color of crisp apple wine—he told and retold the story incessantly, from way back when they had first met on one of the streets of Makhachkala, heads shaven, tattooed numbers on their arms or backs: it was raining sheets, he said, at first everything was awash in rain, leaving uniform grayness all around, the rain turning into silver streams; ”Oh what a girl she was”—he told the story more and more frequently, each time with fresh details, leaving no room for misgivings; the girl had died, she was hit by a car; but she

had clearly existed, Jonah thought of her every day and even envied the man—“The thing is, Jonah, she wasn’t running to me”; thus Jonah passed his days, at times moseying around the streets, looking upward, listening to the music breaking and tumbling out of the windows of the conservatory on Karl Marx Street; there were times when he’d sit along the walls of the Lavra Monastery, blowing into a simple flute, his eyes hidden behind his mop of long curly hair; he would play without even taking off his cap. “There’s another young bum that doesn’t wanna work ...”; the light moved to the other side of the train station, so that now the man known as Horik Piskariov, the man with a scar straight across his face, walked in shadow, and even in the pervasive stench of the station Jonah could detect the scent of chromium on the man’s leather jacket, “his black steed with the shabby mane charging at the white one”; it seemed that Jonah had recuperated at the forester’s hut for only a few days; he recovered his senses slowly, as if someone had disposed of his innards: it was a small room, always dark, the walls hung with threadbare carpets; time and again someone’s big hunched back blocked the window, making everything look blue and plunging Jonah into that blueness; he’d drift off, dreaming that he was flying off somewhere through endless white space; the suddenly sunken sky drew Jonah out of the trance as it crushed every sound, even the quiet sounds; “A stand of linden trees, everything springing upward, where this was”—a waft of dense vapor, of steaming fresh milk; people milled about, looking like black tree trunks in a flood of velvet fog; “Has he regained his strength?” with a light hiss in the throat. “I think so ... But what I should do now, I don’t know ...,” said another weary voice, a voice trying to sound kind.

Jonah was on guard; he tried to lift his arms, but a grating pain was gripping his body twisting his muscles; people walked by, and Jonah felt good as he listened to

their voices; he felt neither panic nor alarm; everything was fluid, pulling him along into whiteness: does it remind you of something? Then, a woman's voice, a warm voice, a voice that touches the heart directly; he raised his hands, hands stripped to the flesh, blue-red hands. "What else you want? Halka!!! Halka! What? Let's wait for Nurim, and then we'll talk ... It's so quiet there! No one will pay more 'n three hundred for that piece-a dead meat, and this summer we gotta set Halka up in the city, for some kind-a education, or she'll start hanging around here with the darkies"—the voice rose. "Quiet down, or she'll hear you. Halka! Halka! Go see what's up with that lost soul ..." The sweet, repulsive smell of steamed milk, an uncovered bosom, pink breasts tumbling out, hanging over Jonah—slowly, carelessly, a hand shoves them back; soft breasts that have tried everything there is to try, with large chocolate nipples; the blot that was a face started to hop around: "He's breathing ... looks like he's breathing ..." "If he could be well enough by next month..."—the voice quieted, slowly dropping in tone. "Nurim will be here tomorrow ... What d'ya tell 'im ..."—this in a high-pitched feminine voice. "Why should I tell him anything? I might change my mind. It's not as if we're short of work. So, he's feeble, so what? He's tough ..."—something smelled of white, white and then red, and then as if he'd been struck by hail; Jonah could barely turn his head—a window and through it woods and a little farther on a hillock, a pine tree brushed with light, bluish snow; and, still farther, something that looked like a ravine, and more falling snow; a voice, a woman's voice: "Old man! Old man! Have you gone completely deaf, or what? Here's what I have to say and think—what the hell does Nurim need him for? It's winter, there aren't any jobs in the clay pit. The sooner we get him up on his feet—we'd keep him busy." "What are you plotting? Who's master in my house? Yeah, yeah ... if you can bring him back to his feet, then okay. The whole world

can hear you, you old bitch. I'm done, you've singed me for the last time…"—the despairing voice droned on. "Halka, put a dressing on his hands … no, not on the old man's, on the one who wandered in …" "I don't wanna. You go do it." "But if it's to wiggle wiggling your ass on the streets, you're first in line!" "Lay off, you old biddy!"—the sun oozed a red glow, at last a ray of light reached his eyes too: a door cracked open and through it he saw long white legs covered in goose bumps, shivering white legs; then the whole body of a girl in tight pink panties, her auburn hair falling to her shoulders—a strong body; it grew dark; the door creaked and opened wider—a shadow obstructed his view; "Come on, already, hurry up before Mother comes back"—it was snowing again: a voice weary, anguished, sweet; it kept snowing and snowing: snow piled up in drifts, sketching indistinct, mysterious outlines in the twilight—"I might as well sink in this immensity, where the warmth of your bosom fades away, where so many strange words have been spoken, yet too few words as well, too few familiar people; and too few bird cries—disgusting, all of it, like the waste from maternity wards—hope—vomitus, froth on the sea of humanity—he who saw the light lives in darkness. Gloom. And the nightingale, that bird, laughs heartily. And you, you fly into the fire like a lark, carried by the wind, swept up in the fumes, a gray clump spiraling through the overturned hell in the sky"; he discerns a rustle with the snow, a sob—where had he heard it? A flock of gulls flew before his eyes, their squawks falling to the lowest depths in the bluffs amid the low mountains, the tight swarm unraveling in the cliffs: then orchards burst into view, crunchy with the greenery of May; puffs of cherry blossom pollen, droplets of dew—"My little tenderness, now that I've become aware of your presence in me, why do you scatter?"; indistinct graceful shadows walked by, the stench of deathly heat in the air, the heart's unquenched thirsting, the sensation of vertigo: a distant shore, a magnificent

luminous shore—at arm's length it was—the old, broad acacia tree, a smaller one behind it, a fetid swamp sunk between eroded banks, a stretch of wheat, flattened by the wind, baked in the sun, a figure fixed at the horizon, dark thunder clouds approaching; and he runs, the brittle nettles sting his feet, he skips over the stalks of weeds, bloodying his feet on the uneven ground; the white figure dissolves, looks like just a small disheveled cloud, but he's not heading toward it, his eyes are glued elsewhere; "Mama," he says—but it is something else, veiled in the light of a distant sun, a blue sky; it is only here and now in the semi-darkness that Jonah begins to realize; it spreads a chill, captivates him ever more, this innermost desire; the opening in the door turns rosy. "Come, quick, hurry…" the girl is saying as she lures someone in; a dark shadow dims the pink glow; "Leave it open, or Mother …" the girl's voice goes on, playful, gravelly, the words coming out of her mouth in a single breath, eagerly, disgustingly; Jonah sees a plump, freckled hand pulling down the panties, the hunched shadow takes fitful breaths, drawing in saliva with the air, swallowing greedily, saying nothing, constantly obscuring, obscuring the white patch of flesh, the roused loin. "Come on, do it!…" "Just like that?"—the snow falling in wide swaths, the bright flakes sticking to the window, erasing the black crossbar of the window frame; Jonah sees her entire body, standing erect, right across from him, the knotty hand edges in between her legs, undoing her with twisted fingers—"who was it then walking along quiet streets, shaking out her long, long hair, the fences and the clusters of flowers dappled with the fluid shadows of the linden trees, the clumps of flowers; who was it that spoke, who was it that loved you, Jonah"; with hooked hands he picks her up and pulls her down on top of himself; her long fingers embrace his neck, his short neck; a shameless look, a turbid look; the anchored feet push away from the angled door, springing this way and that way, head thrown back,

lifted forward, well-defined in the red glow of evening; out of the half-open lips come words, as if addressed to Jonah, the eyes translucent, the eyes of a dragon—”Ah-h-h, good. Faster ... e-e-e-e, faster ...” “I ca-n-n’t ...” “Go-o-o-od”—surges of warmth inundated Jonah: a glimmer of white legs, a face leans over the shoulder of the invisible man; tightening the rings of arms and legs around the man, she moans a long moan, falls away and topples onto the bed; a heavy, sweet perfume of cornflowers, and bitter scent of almonds engulfed Jonah; a squeal, and another bitter smell—the stench of burning tires, the smell of leather army jackets; the military contractor Larysa Makhninenko had her established place on the sweaty mattress, an exclusive mattress, restricted to officers’ use—a striped, civilian mattress; the war had just started; Larysa, a radio operator who later worked in the mess hall, was first seduced by Azik, an officer from the special forces battalion, a dark-haired lieutenant, a Chechen draftee, who brought her marijuana every time; they fucked by the tent, and threw bottles—Azik copulated wildly, almost raping her. Eventually he disappeared, they said he was killed somewhere near the Panjshir valley—the mujahideen skinned him because Azik had wiped out a whole village of theirs, which was almost unheard of back then; an unkempt Larysa kept returning to the place where they had made love; she would sit there, crying, her infected eyes weeping yellow pus. The winter was cold that year, the sharp winds blowing sand; after bringing in wood for the stove, the soldiers would throw Larysa on that mattress…

From then on, waking in the morning, Jonah always listened to the creaking floor—an elusive rattle of the floorboards—as if something was sneaking up on him; overhead he saw a pale, vaguely transparent spot; he smelled a wearyingly familiar scent, something he had recently come across but hadn’t tried; smelling it, he found himself involuntarily immersed in decay and in joy—a

luminous joy, wrought out of poison, and misery clawed at him, scraping underfoot, because he knew the source of that poison; someone's hands touched him; soft little pillows slid across his chest; the stink of bad breath clung to his face; the scent of freshly laundered sheets tickled his nostrils; the palms comforted him, and then they were gone. Daily and gradually, his fatigue diminished and in its place a corrosive restlessness set in; a sense of horror hardened in his chest: outdoors old Nykodym, Halyna's father, was cursing and thrashing a horse with the reins—all those years that had trickled by like sand between his fingers, the years saturated with a dismal madness and rampant, sickening ignorance; all those anguished, wrecked years had congealed inside; but the girl would come in to rub Jonah's body with a foul-smelling lotion; he'd wait and wait for her, impulsively counting the hours; images of blistering-hot gravel appeared to Jonah at times, sometime around St. Elijah's Day—green waves scattering sparkling droplets, the gromwell absorbing the sunlight, the hypericum growing firm, the birds piercing holes in the massive clouds pregnant with rain, the waves hurtling forward one on top of the other and then pausing; the gulls skirting the sun then imperceptibly dropping to the ground; inside, someone is lying between the pale blue walls, wrapped up in the folds of a bedsheet; outside, the chill of autumn was nibbling away at the shore—someone is leaning over him, but Jonah cannot remember—no matter how he tries; he just wanted to retrieve the memory of a woman: surrounded by the sea, with white flowers, and yellow flowers, standing tall, on a slope, a steep slope, from where the sand on the beach looked colorless, and birds were silently dropping down into the depths of the cliffs—and in the midst of the twisted brush, her overly elongated neck, entwined with snakes of yellow, slightly wilted lilies; Jonah searched his memory but the woman was lost—a cracked windowsill, a carafe on a table, the chatter of

orange-gray birds beyond the window, the rain pelting the poplars at night; he almost remembers a hand but immediately catches himself, because the hand is all that crystalizes; darkness brims over like ink, it's raining hailstones over the rooftops, the wind picks up, the sea roars, tossing waves that eat away layer after layer of cooled pebbles, dead seaweed, and dead fish; in the twilight, in the blue twilight, he hears a loud noise and, surprisingly, this he remembers vividly: gentle ripples flirting with reflected heaps of beet-colored clouds, a white hand, the taste of something sweet in his mouth, the juice of crushed grapes; the black sun has plunged downward, and the sparrows, too; shadow enfolds the hands; the sparrows plunge downward, plunging with the sun; a storm approaches: a wild whistling from the east, tearing the air to pieces, beating a rhythm of ta-ta-ta-bam-bam-bam-ta-ta-m-m, like the thumping of train wagons, gnawing the flesh with cold, sucking the body (that miserable, tired body), into some kind of quagmire. The sun going down. The black sun. Jonah was coming round—the ugly, murky day was drying out, lapsing into bands of black and white; "So that's what it is," Jonah said to himself, the melting snow on the other side of the window frame peeling off like old skin, like blisters. Jonah felt himself somewhere else, his mouth the only thing moving: sweetened milk dribbled in; he sensed the dense stink of manure from the girl's clothes, she wore a flowery blouse and short boots: "He's coming to ... our poor fellow is coming round. Look at his sad face ..." "Put the ointment on his hands, smear it on his hands ... we don't need someone with no hands..." Nykodym approached, a cigarette butt stuck to his bottom lip, his square, pallid face streaked with fine purple veins. Sitting down on a stool, stretching out his legs, his feet stuck in a pair of felt booties, he watched as Halka applied the ointment to Jonah's battered hands; from behind he crawled in under her skirt and pinched her, painfully: "Let's

have some of this...” his filmy eyes floating like two plates; “Get lost ... can’t you see I’m busy.” “Busy-busy-busy,” Nykydom muttered under his nose. The sun was setting; faces reddened. Halka pushed the hem of her skirt in around the waistband and leaned her hands against the edge of the bed—a solid bed, with curved legs, the color of burnished cherry—and shamelessly, breathing hard, the old man went at it— “Look at this, look at this”—huffing and grunting behind her; the bed barely squeaking; nervously the old man kept looking at the door. Halka looked out the window with vacant eyes, her meaty lips in a frown; the old geezer said something or other, his lame eye twitched, sweat rolled down his broad chest— “Are you all done?” Halka called out behind her. “No, wa-a-a-it.” “Geez you’re disgusting ... I’m sick of you ... that’s it...” “M-m-m ... khr-r-r swee ...” “I’ll tell Nurim, just you wait...” The wind tore the tiles off the roof; the weeds curved downward; Jonah caught sight of a gray mangy bitch, her engorged teats swaying, puppies playing with a tattered doll; the old man exhaled with a whistle, squealed “Done ...,” and sat down on the stool, his pants still around his feet; Jonah felt drowsy: “Dreams, unfathomable and white, sought out in the beyond, dreams as memories, to spite ... and two crosses ...Why is your chest bare—and stop swinging your feet, you’re rocking the devils in hell.” “Rain. Grandma, rain—where does it come from, the rain?” “Tears from Heaven—God’s tears.” “You mean God can cry, Granny?” “Of course, my dear child, of course ... crying for us is all He does ...”; tatters of twilight reached across the train station, freight loaders in bespattered aprons hauled frozen calf carcasses, the Gypsy kids winding their way around them; from outdoors a deafening, dense whistle, as if tamped with wool, surged in, trailing Horik Piskariov; the whistle sounded again, and Horik stopped; his gaze met Jonah’s; Jonah moved a shoulder, as if preparing to receive a blow, and raised his head up high: “His black steed

charges toward the white one”; and again Jonah ducked into the little gray lagoon of the surreal—“Halka! Halka! What’s with you? ’r you deaf, or what... may you ...” “What’s wrong?” “Go, your father’s calling you”—the sun rolled darkly and Jonah strained to breathe as he rubbed off oily sweat with his one good finger; Halka was sitting on the edge of the bed, the worn sheet tucked under her, breathing like a frisky colt; the bedsprings creaked, the air smelled of wilted herbs; out beyond the ravine lay patches of steppe, in which a lonely pine tree had broken through to reach for the sky, and the days gaped like black holes; a throbbing, washed-out sun rose, and the mind froze, drowning in the voiceless gray space—“I don’t know why but it hurts, Daddy, and I can’t remember you like you should be remembered, as if some evil person has come and one by one pulled out threads like vultures flying flying flying look here a constant swell in the silver streams could it be your gift but I just can’t recall something gleams and gets lost”; on the second to last day of autumn all the snow melted, and Jonah regained his strength; the wind blew in from the east, chasing the tumbleweed into the hollows; Nurim appeared; Jonah recognized him by his warbling, deep voice; Jonah was sitting in a chair across from the barn while old Nykodym bustled about, raking out slabs of frozen manure with a pitchfork: “O-o-oh ... the esteemed Nurim has arrived, we have someone special here ...” Halka blushed and stayed out of sight, her eyes scurrying all around; Jonah felt disgusted with her; the old man rushed about setting things on the table; the housewife kindled a fire in the stove using cornstalks—“Nurim likes the warmth of the stove”; the she-dog bared her teeth—“Stoppit, Laika, Nurim’s fine”; Nykodym rushed here and there, repeatedly glancing at the door, then stealthily put a rifle under the mattress along the wall; flustered, Halka was all a-glow, radiant, dressed in tight jeans that clung to her backside and a blouse made of Turkish wool; her lips hung open like

a child's, her still innocent eyes, made up with blue eyeliner, were misty as she gazed at Nurim—a short man, barely reaching Jonah's shoulder. Nurim took off his fur coat and dropped it to the floor, making himself comfortable on the bench next to the stove; he took out a nearly full but opened pack of Stolichnie cigarettes, lit up and puffed, didn't say a word and offered them to Jonah; his calf-eyes staring out the window, he remarked in bad Russian: "Yah, yah, this year coming was be a cold one.." "Not *was* but *will be*," snapped Nykodym, correcting him; he can't keep still, his black fingers fumbling over the white tablecloth, while his wife quietly hides Halka behind the door. Nurim narrows his naturally narrow eyes and finally poses the question that Nykodym has been expecting: "How much ya want for 'im?" He spits on the floor and goes on: "If that is wanted man, I won't give even ruble for 'im. You know damn well the times we lived in ..." "He's not tainted, no way. You gotta understand, Nurim, I'm an honest man. Not some slant-eyed Kazakh." "How can you prove it?" "How, how? Listen, if you don't want him, I'll find others who will." "There are no others. Alright ... let's have a snack after all that traveling ..." Unexpectedly a beam of light falls across Nurim's raised face, a face that looks as if it had been glued together out of two separate parts—two flat, colorless halves—the mutt of a pooch; Nykodym tried to get a conversation going: "Is it true, my dear Nurim, that for you eating pork fat is forbidden?" "Allah can't see what I do here ..." Jonah could hear them chomping already, pouring the vodka; light filtered in through all the holes; Nurim drank little, mostly he ate, his fingers dripping with fat. Nurim felt the muscles on Jonah's shoulders—"dzhigit"—outside the weeds bowed in the wind, and Jonah suddenly felt afraid. The wind howled under the roof; then a voice: "Let him stay with us till spring—he's half-dead." "Don't you worry, old woman—we don't have far to go, we'll make it." Jonah stretched deliciously and recalled that that

was how kids stretched when they find an answer to a question, they couldn't find an answer to for several days—they grow calm, now that they have the answer. It hadn't occurred to Jonah—or it just hadn't sunk in—that this conversation had finally ended the crushing state of uncertainty he'd been in; of course, he thought to himself: "A person adapts quickly to whatever he's allowed."

Several days later, as Nykodym was busy skewering the frozen manure patties with a pitchfork, the red and green veins puffing up on his neck, and Jonah was sitting on the stool by the wall of the mud barn, specks of people came tremblingly into view in the far distance beyond the gray patches of shrubs. "It's Nurim!" Halka cried out. "I won't let that bastard have him." In the blinding sun Jonah couldn't see anything, except for the flicker of Halka's plump freckled arms; a moment later the dogs began to growl, a pant leg ripped, a shot rang out, and one of the dogs edged away along the fence on three legs, pawing the ground. A clamoring rooster tore out of the barn and pitched forward, wobbling up and down, wildly flapping its dazzling wings, its feathers falling warmly across Jonah's cheeks. Then the sun vanished. Nurim's face, contorted and blue, floated before Jonah; something seemed to pour into his head; a sense of unease ruptured and settled in the back of his neck, a dull and almost paralyzing ache; the light of the sun went out, the noise stopped.

The camp was drenched in never-ending rain: to the left clumps of low overcast sky looked down, and a bit farther off lay clay pits and squat cliffs, though upon closer scrutiny it was plain that they were piled-up granite boulders polished clean by the wind and rain. Between the cliffs and the sky lay the camp, wholly exposed to the elements, and it was here that the residents, puppet-like, and soaking wet, sloshed around from building to building in the heavy fog. Jonah couldn't remember how, when, or where he had ended up among the dozens of no-longer-

young men who lived in a single barracks: they lay in rows under disgustingly foul-smelling blankets, pulling back nervously every time someone's elbow accidentally touched them. They lay like that, freezing and famished, until they fell into deep slumber, as if switched off. "Nothing gives a man more strength than a sense of despair," Jonah thought to himself, but how can a herd of cattle be made to realize that they have indeed lost everything they could possibly lose, and that nothing will ever come back. "Listen, guys," he said, "What are we waiting for ... What are we waiting for ..."? "So, you start, and we'll back you up." They remained by the stove, trying to warm up, sitting in the heat that radiated from the hissing green wood; without giving Jonah as much as a glance, they crept back into their little corners, as cross-eyed Nurim's half-blood assistant—his diamond-shaped head on its short neck looking as if it grew directly from his shoulders—flashed a light along the bottom of the propped-up tarp.

It was the middle of winter when Jonah was brought to the brick-making camp, or maybe it was at the beginning of winter; he wasn't sure—a severe blow to the head had left him debilitated: "Your luck sucks, either your head gets it or someplace close—and whatever ails you, they 'fix'"; nothing out of the ordinary happened at the camp: Khaliam, wearing pink silk motorcycle pants, ran up to him, his Adam's apple bobbing strangely: "So-o-o, shall we get to work? If we don't—zh-zh-zhzh," and with the side of his hand he made a slashing motion across his throat, bursting out in a rumble of laughter, at first lightheartedly but then hysterically, sounding like a vicious dog. The men stood around in a half-circle and snickered. They had all come voluntarily to this central part of Crimea, a good distance from the sea, where in deserted places amid the cliffs the Chechen Nurim's guys had built small factory-like settlements, for making bricks and mattresses and processing opium brought in from the northern part of the

peninsula; in the summer, to keep the unpaid slaves occupied, they were forced to craft wattled fences out of cattails. Resistance or opposition was unthinkable—the supervisors and guards were selected from among the men themselves, and they ate whatever was available. If somebody suddenly perked up or thought of escaping, Khaliam was immediately notified, and he would beat the poor wretch within an inch of his life with a rubber hose. Even so, Jonah noticed, it was Khaliam's soft, fleshy hand, the edge of the palm of that hand, that provoked the greatest fear among the camp residents: narrowing his eyes like a cat and making a cutting noise Khaliam would pretend that he was slashing somebody's throat: "Zh-zh-zhzh." Before long, over a couple of days Jonah became fraught with horror: picking up a cup he had made out of a can of fruit, he sat down by the stove where Lotia the stove-minder always napped and, shoving his blue, abscessed hands into his shirt, Jonah asked, "Some bread—is there any bread?"; to which Lotia gestured with that same hand-slash across his throat: "Bread, a little bread"; Jonah was paralyzed by the cold, which penetrated him from head to foot. Over and over he'd recite from memory: "… It was just a few steps to the first bus stop, and right there along the road grew a copse of linden trees—green, young trees, not yet thinned out, offering cooling shade, even in midsummer, especially at noon; and noon it always seemed surprisingly deserted there"; Lotia hopped around the stove: "Help me wake the crew, smart-ass"; and the crew willingly got up, because "Husseinovych had promised to treat with a bit of vodka"; thus it went day after day. And then, the sun sent warmth through the clouds and March was near. Khaliam beckoned him over: "Come here, smart-ass. Here. You say you know a lot.... Okay, that means you'll be telling Husseinovych stories at night ..." He was a stray too not a Chechen nor a local; he'd arrived one day in his silk sport pants; word had it that after talking something over with

Nurim, he'd just stayed on: he would sit around dozing, eyes nearly shut, or he'd wander around sticking his nose into every detail. Most important, though, he hadn't come empty-handed, he brought along his "bzhi-zhi-zhi." That was kept under wraps. One day Lotia, who was a nice, calm chap, decided to run off—turned out all he wanted was to get a bottle of vodka—so Khaliam beat the hell out of him and likely would have killed him, if Lotia hadn't named several accomplices. "An execution tonight," Khaliam announced, raising the palm of his hand and winking; the crowd of huddled figures jumped up and down: "Execution! Execution! Execution!" A bonfire was lit; a wave of excitement swept across the camp; Jonah watched the preparatory work for the execution—three posts were dug into the ground, and not far away a soft spot was arranged for Nurim Husseinovych; at dusk five young guys, their hands tied, struggling to break free, were brought out—"Sh-sh-sh, boys—it's all over." Arms twisted behind them, the boys were seated back-to-back. A fired-up Khaliam joyfully yelled out and shouted something; huddled over, he took a quick look between his legs, hissed like a cat, leaped in and out of the construction trailer where he lived, downed some vodka, and rushed about, zigzagging around the bonfire. When he saw Lotia and his pals being brought out, Jonah was horrorstruck. Three of them were tied to the poles, the work detail all the while stomping their feet and gulping vodka— "execution execution execution." Jonah almost knew beforehand what would happen; what shocked him most were all those wide-open, immense, almost child-like eyes. Khaliam yelled out a shriek: the granite boulders sent back an echo, and under the cold, low sky the spectators' heads, looking like smudges of grease, bobbed up and down. All of a sudden, hearing a subdued "bzh-zhi-zhi," they saw that Khaliam was holding a Druzhba chainsaw: again and again he started it, shut it off, and turned it on again, engaged the chainsaw, waved it over his

head, crouched down, and shoving his mug between his legs, stuck out his tongue.

"Tragedy precedes catastrophe ...," thought Jonah; and then, forcing himself to look away, he saw a puff of feather grass floating through the air, white, unsullied summer feather grass, its scent of maple syrup tantalizing the senses; a spray of blood and a head along with the end of a pole fell into a puddle. The next two victims screamed, as if scorched by fire, only to turn silent as stone; only the thin blue lines of their lips were moving; "bzhi-zhi-zhi-i" buzzed the chain-saw, and the spectators took another gulp of vodka as they discussed the event—obviously this wasn't the first time they were witnessing something like this; they chatted about which way the other heads would fall and in what direction they would roll....

Jonah spat and stealthily, making sure no one would notice, snuck a look at the group of young guys; he thought he recognized one of them, though it might be that it just seemed that he did—the guys were so brutally beaten black and blue, and their ribs stuck out so abnormally; for a moment, the whine of the chain-saw broke off; Khaliam was dispensing advice to the last head: "God! God? God?!"—he was hopping on one leg and wiping his splayed hand on his yellow silk pants. "Me! I'm the one! You hear? I'm the one taking on God's role in the world ... and I must not forget, here in the barracks there is no God other than Allah. And for the time being I'm taking on the duties of your God"—a buzz of the saw; a head struck the puddle; new guys were dragged over to the bonfire where Nurim reclined on soft skins. The next morning, as Hlosik and Kosik, the Chechens' assistants in charge of live goods, masturbated over the cover of *Soviet Woman*, one of the newly-arrived men, kneading his stiff body, still black and blue and bruised from all the beatings, settled in next to Jonah: "Listen, brother ..." Jonah shushed him to be quiet—that was the day it got underway: they worked prudently,

judiciously, calmly, even confidently, but that surprised no one, not even slant-eyed Khaliam, although he did run over to Nurim and spent a long time whispering something in his ear, as Jonah watched out of the corner of his eye—as if nonchalantly, as if Khaliam chanced to appear in his scope—a part of his gelatinous, silky-smooth neck ringed with wrinkles. With March about to arrive, Khaliam seemed wound up; he wandered around the camp, got drunk, and turned on the chain-saw, buzzing it over the heads of the guys laboring in the clay pit, his lips turned up in a sneer; he was anticipating something: rumor had it that some business would be conducted among the slant-eyed, some people from the Caucasus were expected, they would take the more lively ones with them, and whoever was left, as everyone knew, would be drowned in the swamps. The sky filled with darkness; the first spring rain was imminent. And against the backdrop of the dark sky, wholly unexpectedly, a figure arose, a silhouette against the ashen sky: it was Jonah. For an instant he wavered, somehow self-assuredly, and the shapes that a moment ago were mere specks bent down and retrieved the knives; something inside Jonah shifted, he felt a twang of joy: in the distance he saw swarms of mosquitoes suspended in the air, readying for the month of May—soon it would be summer, soon; knives cleaved the air, and Nurim made a dash for the trailer; Jonah ran at an angle to cut him off, for he knew that inside the trailer Nurim had weapons; they panted, running up the hillside; they dug into the gravel, displacing bits of space, losing sight of the sky—“God forbid, that’s where the weapons are”; they ran an eternity under an overcast, empty sky; they ran seeing no sun present, and when a shot rang out they turned their heads and saw no one, nothing, just gravel showering down and then collapsing in an avalanche under Nurim’s feet; snorting and wheezing blood, he crawled over to Jonah’s; Jonah, having broken a vertebra in Nurim’s spine, was already running

toward the trailer—“bzh-zh-zhi-i”; the buzzing cut through the air; a gray shadow bent over something, moving its legs clad in yellow silk sport pants; all at once Jonah realized it was Khaliam: blood spattered over the walls of the trailer, a sawed-off hand lay like a snake among the stones, trying to grasp someone for the last time; breathlessly, Jonah jumps into the trailer, steeped in the heavy stench of musk, tobacco, and burnt tea; the pages of glossy porn magazines rustled; under a mattress he found two pistols, a rifle, and a Kalashnikov. In the distance—cries. The guards who had delivered the latest living cargo brought in by train and ships were still there. Draping the weapons over himself, stuffing ammunition into his pockets, Jonah clambered up the slope: two Chechens were shooting their rifles randomly. They were lousy shots but managed to bloody up some of the guys. A round from the Kalashnikov quieted things down. Gray shadows scrambled up the hill— “Hurry, hurry up! Nurim’s servant has escaped …” Flashing knives penetrated bodies bluntly. There came the sound of flesh being ripped off bones.

For the longest time after the escape nobody saw the sky; the men followed Jonah through swamps, through marshes, through ash-heaps of some sort—how many died, how many survived? At noon they stumbled upon a big stone cistern filled with water; a splash of red sunlight spilled across the plains; the vineyards gushed with the fresh green juice of grapes; Jonah dropped to his knees, went still, and then pulled out a small, tattered book; making the sign of the cross in the air with it in hand, he intoned: “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.” The group simply repeated the prayer, and one by one set out to gather at the lake. Within an hour a raft was rigged up; singing psalms, Jonah took to the helm and aimlessly steered the unstable vessel forward; but maybe not so aimlessly, after all? How can you know what a person is thinking when that person hasn’t seen the sun for

such a long time? “Thou shalt swim along desert shores, and they will not seem like desert shores, and the heart alone will rejoice.” On the third day, two more died; Jonah resisted a chorus of appeals urging him to turn off the chosen path and seek help from the authorities; pale, his lips turning white with tension and determination, he convincingly explained to them over and over, hour after hour, what would happen if they sought help. Overnight they lost one more, who was barely an adolescent; Jonah read prayers over him; afterwards, a menacing circle of men contracted around him; Jonah waved his hand: “Do as you think best!” He tossed them the weapons and let them disembark close to the nearest settlement, all white with cherry blossoms: “May God help you.” “And may he help you too, Jonah—and if we’ve done you wrong, forgive us.”

The following day, a helicopter hovered above the boundless gray water; the men who had stayed with Jonah looked up anxiously: “we told you to head for the seasonal road. Now we have to deal with cops.” The helicopters hovered in the clear sky for a good minute and then flew off, their blades clattering over a large village, apparently headed toward the sea; Jonah’s nostrils flared like those of a horse—the sea was close by. Somewhere inside his head, lights flashed on and off: he was recovering his memory, which washed clean over the ensuing days; determined to make it, they—the five of them—stubbornly rowed on, using boards cautiously and quietly and mostly at night; mornings, they lit scant campfires, over which they grilled mushrooms, bits of fish, and the occasional bird. Days became indistinguishable from one another; May was half over, but as usual they saw very little sun; three couldn’t take it anymore and left. The last man didn’t leave Jonah until the end of the month, and then, as soon as he tasted the salt of the sea on his lips, he gave a mysterious smile: “This is it, brother. It’s time. If you want, you can come with me. The contraband isn’t spectacular, but at least you’ll be

able to eat. We'll find you a partner, if ..." "Thanks." "Well, as you wish." The sun broke through the clusters of cottony clouds, a light wind picked up; "Sea breeze," thought Jonah. "Trains didn't want to carry me, so let's try by boat"; it was in the second month of his escape that Jonah walked out onto a road, passing surprised grannies who were pulling their tethered goats, and vanished into the port. A gentle wind rustled old newspapers; the midday heat wove a diaphanous web; cranes slowly turned their booms, scribbling aimlessly in the clear sky; the world was warm and peaceful.

"Listen, curly-head ..." Horik was rolling his tongue around his mouth. "Old Marfa's incessant jabbering drove me nuts, so I wasn't even aware of all the misery around me ... although—how should I put it—that wasn't at all what I had wanted, no—not that, not that at all ..." Horik gnashed his teeth and punched his thigh with his fist; outside the windows flickered a dark gray dawn. "It didn't even sink in that my family was all gone, that Sio-Sio was dead. It's only recently, after all these years, that I've started thinking back and remembering all of them—Grandma, strangled, lying in the ashes, and Sio-Sio, wailing, crawling, all tangled up in filthy bed-sheets and curtains; but that's not the point...That morning is still in here," he said, and slapped the back of his neck. "Sultan leaned on me-—that is, to work together; you've got to understand, there was no way out. No matter how you tried to weasel out of it... Sultan was forever driving me into corners and dead-ends; he'd gotten rid of all my guys, he bumped off Glycerin, Peps, Redistributor, all of them except Botsman—once a rat, always a rat; the asshole remains an asshole, the leader a leader, ... and he had bought his way in by using Nilka, you hear, by prostituting Nilka, but that's all bull ... she's not coming back, you can't come back from that; so, okay, that's not for me, but I won't go where Nikandrych was sent, and came back, crawling, a syphilitic

—fuck it, I wasn’t gonna end up there. Just so you see where I’m coming from, I had believed in all that shit, I trusted it would all turn out, and when you believe in what you’re doing, and do well at it to boot, then …” Horik grew quiet and seemed to search his mind for something. Jonah, leaning on his elbow, thought to himself: “This is how lost pain and grief are recovered….”

After winter had passed, after the death of the last ruler, Jonah moved closer to the Lavra, to be with the monks; by sweat and prayer he earned his daily bread; in the evenings he murmured the words of the psalms to himself while following the lines in the Bible with his finger, and then, his stomach growling with warm memories of food, he fell asleep. And then one day an unexpected visitor with expressionless, utterly vacant eyes appeared before him, only a scar indicated it was Horik Piskariov: “Listen here, monk, my late grandmother recited prayers too … and look, that didn’t save her …” He turned his head, emitting a thick, appealing smell of vodka and laundered shirts; a sweet and somehow otherworldly fragrance wafted through the air: Jonah listened to Horik: how he raped women and girls by the dozens—waitresses right at the tables, the self-absorbed foolish daughters of professors; how together with Sultan, little by little, section by section, they came to rule over the entire neighborhood, and then a year later broadening their rule over yet another; how Nilka had never left Horik’s dreams, even as he’d get his hands on yet another stupid girl and screw her; talking on and on, he mixed in things that Jonah didn’t understand at all: “It wasn’t my success that spurred me on, but something bigger, completely … well, how can I say it: misery can steer you in all kinds of directions, but I longed for a celebration of the spirit.” Here Jonah had no idea what Horik was talking about, he just commiserated, nodding his head, while fragile as a sparrow Mykytka, who was preparing for monastic tonsure, remarked, “Damned

criminal. Yuk"; and Jonah proceeded to describe, who knows to whom and to what end, the non-existent, lush green island that he had imagined so many times that he had gradually begun to believe in its existence; and as he finished telling the story, he saw how profoundly the story had affected his audience—they, too, believed that somewhere that island existed. Horik kept dragging on a cigarette and shaking out his bones, kept unloading his stories on Jonah, as if trying to clean out his insides: most likely he was trying to prove something to himself—at least, the non-existence of the world he was describing. He folded his hands in his lap, and Jonah noted his long, almost feminine fingers, with their pink fingernails. Jonah listened about how Horik had made contact with the big man, the boss, that is, the one they called Heraclius. He had offered his support to Horik so perfectly—this was in the days when fierce battles raged between new organizations, new alliances; when the new word "racket" became fashionable, replacing the old one, "shakedown"—truth be told, Nikandrych had reveled in using "racket" and did so frequently, smacking his lips deliciously as he did so; that very same well-fed Heraclius, in his ripped jacket, had taken Horik by the elbow and led him to a car, a long, black Mercedes that looked much like a hearse: "You and me, we need to talk…" Horik had looked at him stupidly, unable to believe that all that tiresome training he'd gone through with Sultan's people, all that information gathering, even from Svitlana, who suffered in agony over her unbreakable longing for her pimp, would in the end bring him to the one and only Heraclius: "You want Nilka—you'll get her, but …"

From then on, Botsman did nothing but eradicate people, while Horik sat in the adjoining room, relishing the sounds of necks snapping. Sultan was last on the list. He yelled out something, Horik didn't remember what exactly, something like: "I'm the one who made you a somebody." Truth be told, Horik didn't much remember Sultan's death.

He was bludgeoned to death, just like Major Syrovatko; memory of Syrovatko's death had stayed with Horik: how the withered and spent old man lay dying in the white snow without uttering a word, only a rattle escaping from his throat after each blow ... whereas Sultan begged and writhed like a snake and oinked like a pig, until Botsman thrust a sharpened stake into his throat; afterwards, at night he would feel Nilka's cold hands—he felt disgust, he didn't know why, and turned over to his side; dry leaves tapped on the window pane, like someone's hands: "Lord, how I wish I could sleep—oh monk, if only you knew…"; and he lay in bed until dawn, stubbornly trying to recall something, like trying to break through ice, keeping his distance, far from everything, frozen stiff—he blew on his frozen hands, not knowing what to do with them; the thought wouldn't leave him that Nilka would never come with him, and not only with him, lying up there on top, nice and warm, not thinking about anything, not even about Sultan, probably with thoughts of better clients running through her head; he was finally sick of all those women, and of that ice-cold body, too; and for the first time in his life he, Horik, Piskariov, felt pity for someone—he pulled out the short Uzi and fired a round into the heap of naked bodies.

"An irrepressible weariness has crashed down on me, and I have no strength to shout or cry; my life is a forsaken stream, flowing into the distance toward the desert, within desolate banks ..." Jonah sucked on the end of a cigarette; the sun was behind the clouds, behind the bell tower; the bells clanged; "He's a bad man, that one who comes to visit you, Jonah." "I forgot to ask you who should visit me and who shouldn't." "Those who come to see you reflect who you are." "Yeah, sure—on crutches!" Horik came persistently every day, at first he sat motionless and then, quietly, he began droning out long narratives, his mutilated hands folded in his lap: "... and then we went along the

slimy corridor of the morgue, a lamp buzzed overhead ... I paid dearly, and who will think of me?... Who will remember me? who?... Tell me, monk.” “I’m not a monk, I just live here.” “People don’t just live somewhere, monk. That doesn’t happen—people live where they feel good.” “Whatever.” “... She lay on the table, her belly sliced open—like a big blue blossom—but do you understand, the further she was gone, the more I wanted her ... No ... not that ...” Astounded, Jonah just looked at him over a steaming-hot cup; fatigue shot through his skull: “I need a nap.” “Go ahead”; but Horik didn’t leave; he stood against a wall of peeling red stucco, huddled in a corner, and sobbed; suddenly, abandoning his memories, standing tall under the peeling wall, he shouted: “So, Jonah, you say that we’re all God’s children… Look at these cripples with rotting stumps instead of hands and feet, with rotten holes instead of genitalia—this, ha-ha-ha, is a caricature of Christ ...” Jonah winced like someone who feels a stranger’s pain. “The city is entrusting me with its eggs—I can feel the larvae moving already. If they push up by sunrise, love will spring forth; and if not, snakes, dragons ... stepping quietly, overshadowing the moon’s leaden light, you will walk from window to door and back again… from the door, on stairs, along a path—obedient to the moon’s blue ray.” Jonah moved fitfully; Mykytka grabbed his staff and ran around in circles: “Get out of here, you demon! Out!” Horik burst out in carefree and what seemed to be composed laughter, picked up a brick, and struck his forehead until it bled—“There you are, priest, take a look—well, suck it out!” and off he ran; the sweat-stained walls, the low, sheltering cellar beckoned to Jonah. Nothing new was born, nothing new emerged, everything just receded, everything sputtered. And thus, they lived, delighting in the autumn beyond the windows, as it ripped apart the silken threads of dreams, and in autumn’s smooth puddles, where the sky had sunk, broken apart by dark red leaves that had

unexpectedly fallen in the still air. Wrapped in a golden somnolence on his way home from work, Jonah saw a figure ahead of him: was it a man or a woman—it was hard to tell. A good feeling came over Jonah; he felt refreshed, tranquil. The creature moved its wings—it had a pair of wings—and in a confident, firm voice, a voice that didn't seem like a voice, said "Look, Jonah!" And when he looked, Jonah saw a spot like a small windowpane, shrouded in a lilac mist and floating in the air, but trembling, as if alive, and through the opening Jonah saw the yellowed steppe, grass the color of bile, bending in the wind; and he sees a person lying in the grass, chewing on an elbow until it bleeds; the person is moving, writhing on his stomach, rising and falling back on his stomach, retching in distress: Jonah recognized Horik Piskariov. Horik lies still for a long while; overhead, a wall of clouds passes over him; Jonah tires of waiting: suddenly there's a commotion, a blur of shadows, shaggy shadows; the person springs up; behind him are angry dogs, gulping mouthfuls of the chilly autumn air, sensing their liberty. At first Piskariov does not see the dogs, he simply smells their presence; as he slowly turns his head toward the willows, toward the river, the grief in his eyes dissolves; already he cannot make it, already the first dog has sunk its teeth into his back, with a second right behind; Piskariov struggles to get up but his legs curl under him; the dogs tear into his flesh, his skin, getting ever closer to the bones. Horik shoots at random, at the people, at the dogs; he runs along the curving spine of the steppe, falls and gets up, falls again; the warm veil over Jonah's senses dissolves, and he hears ferocious screams, the shots ringing out, the bat-like rustle of jackets and coats; laboriously the clouds inch across the sky; a fit of spasms convulses Horik Piskariov; all around him the grass turns beet-red, the wind sweeps clouds across the sun, and the dogs, seizing their liberty, released by the humans, ravenously rip into human flesh and chew gluttonously;

something ruptures, a skinny stream of blood flows from behind the ear out over the neck and behind the collar, a shimmer of white and blue sparks scatter about; Piskariov's head droops from his broken neck and falls atop the shoulder of a man in a leather jacket with epaulettes, the first to lunge at Piskariov with pistol in hand. And Jonah now sees it all from above: the mangled body, the caps of the militia and special forces, the leaden blue river, splayed out, wing-like, in an estuary, and all of it going on and on, coloring his view with the deep red of the forest; Jonah tries to move his leg but his body is totally numb and he doesn't register his body; and the voice again: "Do not be afraid. Follow me. You have passed into the other world. This is where your path ends." Chills run down his spine, but Jonah is not afraid: he feels neither fury nor horror; the dogs tear into the body, flames engulf the Lavra, the cross on top of St. Sophia slashes through the clouds passing by, and the city, a cluster of perspiring gray boxes, huddles close together, rail lines crowded with trams and steam engines, the threads of rail tracks holding the city together; and the souls—they realized immediately that they were souls—float upward like puffs of smoke over the ponds and the reservoirs; they flutter, they hover, veil-like, without disturbing the stagnant, brown, murky water; and then, something catches his eye: a balcony, a naked woman brushing her auburn hair, children's terrified eyes following a ball that's falling into a puddle, the large, solid ribbed shadow of someone dressed in blue fringed breeches hangs above a lamp, wheat fields streaming along a road, pine trees passing by, and the ball rolls on, cutting through puddles, the African continent gracing its surface; a dog savagely flays open a man's gullet, lapping up the black blood; it turns dark; "... because, Lord, I'm not done loving yet, haven't eaten my fill, haven't accomplished any beneficent deed. Lord!" thought Jonah to himself, "I cannot

go forth into the world a freeloader. I'm still young." "Look, Jonah, look!..."

Stirring awake, the first thing Jonah felt was hunger. Carefully he collected his belongings into a suitcase and recited prayers. As he walked out the gate, the church bells rang out, the sound licking the autumn air, rocking it out of its slumber; at first, the bells made a low, quiet sound, so soothing, a purl, making hearts skip a beat, and then, suddenly, the bells was rattling the windowpanes, which startled the pigeons, who broke out in flight; a woman sat on a bench reading a book; she glanced up at Jonah and lowered her head; fighter aircraft roared overhead. It grew dark. The fighter's black wings obscured half the sky, spilling noise over the courtyards and scaring the usually fearless ruddy rats in the dumpsters; passersby raised their faces—the shadows of the planes sank into the depths of their eyes, sharpened their facial contours. The woman locked her slant-eyed gaze on Jonah's eyes. Sunlight beat down again, spilling down from the sky and scattering bundles of light, armfuls of beams yellow and pale blue; pulling leftward, sketching an arc, the fighters vanished. The clicking of heels resumed. Bells pealed. Autumn barged in, bringing with it a scent of apples and the sweet taste of melons from far away. Autumn shrouded the woman; it slid down her shoulders; a gust of wind ripped up the puddle. Jonah's eyes lingered over the winding snake of a crowd, and he decided not to leave this place. No matter what, why should he run: overhead, pigeons coasted through the air and tumbled in warm, white clusters over the red, green, and blue rooftops; somewhere it was raining cats and dogs; puddles were glistening. Autumn. Not yet winter....

The woman was reading something on white pages opened wide like butterfly wings and embroidered with caterpillar-like rows of black print, something describing the sea, rain streaming down like crooked wires, and dense

morning fog; she read about a wood building with breezes and sudden drafts blowing through it; about a single bed for two and a panting dog that came up to the door, its tongue flopping about; the couple lying on the narrow bed listened to the dog and the roar of the sea, which pleased the woman. Jonah turned his head, his gaze absorbed in the commotion of the street and a rising mushroom-shaped cloud: as if for the first time he noticed the haze obscuring the white columns and molded facades of the buildings with their alabaster angels; the quiet squares that became pleasant once again; his eyes even clouded over at this: “Autumn, but not winter.…”

… It rained for who knows how many days; even musty old men and women lost count; the leaves had all fallen; like the sky, the earth was black, boundlessly black from end to end, crisscrossed and interconnected by narrow little canals, little tube-like streets and corners; the rainwater washed away all the filth, all the disgusting things; the windowpanes on the buildings, like the eyes of the dead pecked-out by birds, gaped into the emptiness of the city squares and the vacant streets, where blasts of wind blew about solitary pedestrians and soggy newspapers.

A postman in rolled-up blue pants pushed the pedals of a bicycle; churlish and sweaty, he stopped next to a building —a tall black mass hiding half the sky and Holosiiv. Breathing hard, the postman climbed up to the second floor and pressed the doorbell’s red button.

“Don’t you see that everything here is cordoned off?!”

“Excuse me, but I have a certified letter.”

“I’ll take it—I’m the neighbor, we were friends. When he —Horik—comes back, I’ll give it to him.”

“Sign here.”

“Right there?… OK, there you are.…”

Folds of flesh hanging, bands of ribbons encircling her body, shod in one red slipper and one blue one, the old

woman checked the envelope with weary eyes, turned it over and over in her hands, licked it with her white tongue, opened it, and, putting on her glasses as she walked, started to read: then she stopped, sat down, and stopped breathing: at least, that's what it looked like, though if one looked closely—she was praying.

... The woman glanced at the wet street, so strangely deserted, without even a single umbrella's bulging black cupola; she opened the curtain a crack; Jonah saw her white shoulder, appearing nearly marble-like in the stark purple light of evening. She was studying the amber-colored gap in the window opposite.

"There's an old woman in the window, and she's praying," said the woman as if in one outward breath.

"Stop making things up," said Jonah indifferently, and turned over on his back, thinking it's autumn already—thank the Lord it's not winter.

The wind whipped about the tattered flag on the flag-post.

From the base of Vasylkivska Street came the howling of dogs.

Through the holes in the flag shone daggers of starlight.

Translated by Olha Rudakevych

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Lviv, Always

Yuri Andrukhovych

“Only to Lviv!” I would repeat when I was fifteen, and when I was sixteen too, as if slightly altering the chorus of that saccharine Polish tune[5] about whose existence I could not possibly have known back then. “Only to Lviv!”—that was my reply when asked where I would like to go to study.

Why there? I had only a rather vague notion of it back then, stemming mostly from its train station, from which we traveled to Prague many years ago. And that, honestly, was it. It turns out that I had always wanted to go to Lviv because I imagined it to be a train station somewhere in the suburbs of Prague. I’m afraid that I wasn’t mistaken about that.

Nevertheless, I still get excited about the fact that in 1944 the English didn’t succeed in convincing Stalin to let the Poles have it. If they had pulled that off, Lviv would have ended up on the other side of the border, and all my hopes would have vanished. The border between the USSR and Poland would have been somewhere near Vynnyky,[6] and thus the West would have begun just beyond it. And we would not have been allowed to go there.

Since history does not play “what if,” I not only experienced five of the most intense and poignant years of my life there, but also produced everything that I have written to this day. So, if I have a Dublin of my own, it is Lviv.[7]

When I write about it, I can’t help repeating myself. That said, if it is indeed unavoidable, I will attempt at each instance to unearth at least one new revelation. Without

revelations, first and foremost for the author, writing ceases to be writing and becomes rewriting. And if, when I do repeat, I choose completely different words, then it won't count as repetition.

Still, From Lviv, paraphrasing Taras Prokhasko, one can still make a few novels.[8] Moreover, I am convinced that many novels could continue to be made from it. Lviv is novelistic, in the sense that its novels have yet to be written. Yes, I agree—a few novels have already been written about it, some pretty good ones among them. But how do you capture all the possible meanings of this city and its fluctuating features?

I select them at random, understanding that there will always be more.

Port City

Once I referred to it as a city-ship, now let it be a harbor.

That is, let it be a shore, perhaps the estuary of a large river, an aquatic territory, piers, docks, cargo and passenger transports, freight cranes, barges, and 24/7 brothels.

Stanisław Lem, in his *Highcastle*, mentions a bureau of the "Cunard Line" company that had models of ocean liners (the *Lusitania*, the *Mauretania*) in each window. It was located in Lem's interwar Lviv, I believe on Słowacki Street. I wonder when it disappeared—maybe 1939?

In any case, it was then that Lviv ceased being a visible port and became a secret one. It simply cannot not be a port—that was the will of its founders who had for several centuries sought a place for it exactly between the Baltic and Black Seas.

That's why so many dolphins are found on its buildings. They are the second most common (after lions) feature one finds among the city's oldest building ornaments. Maybe they are what give the city its particular fishy chill. You could

assemble an entire photo album filled just with them, filling a whole photographic sea.

A whole novel could be written about the Atlantic eels in the underground river of the city's sewers: the life of an eel from the Sargasso Sea to the Shatsk Lakes, then to the Bug River basin, to the Poltva River, and then back to the ocean. It would be another *Odyssey* or another *Ulysses*. Or, at least, a poem such as this one:

It seems completely possible to me—
the Lviv Opera was built
directly on top of a freshly bricked-up river,
to a certain extent
it can be regarded as
a gigantic river gravestone
or maybe even a mausoleum.
But in that case
the most attuned musicians,
when entering the orchestra pit,
cannot but hear
(that's why they have ears),
how, in the stifling darkness within the pipes,
filling them with quivering and droning,
nearly moaning,
all those eels
try to break through again
in the only possible direction—
towards the Atlantic.
It is known that eels can survive
even in sewer pipes,
thus providing city-dwellers
not only with hope,
but also, an example.

Sometimes it seems that Lviv is first and foremost an underground city. In other words, what is most essential in it

continues with great effort to exist somewhere deep below us. And the orchestra pit, in this case, is something of a transitional space, a waiting or reception room, below which only the waters of the Styx are found.

Chase after two seas and you won't reach either one. Lviv's intermarium condition turned into a non-marium condition. In mid-July of every year of the 1980s, we meandered in a drunken ritual through night-time courtyards along what was once Along-the-Pipes Street,[9] striving to unearth in the darkness at least the remnants of water mills and an old pier. It all smelled of water and slime, and it seemed that we were just about to stumble onto the Wallachian Bridge with its statue of St. John, where we would cross over to the right bank and lay down in its reeds. Small merchant sailboats from Gdansk and Lübeck silently sailed past us along the established Poltva–Bug–Narew–Vistula–Baltic Sea waterway. Salt was traded for amber and Carpathian juniper for Caribbean spices. Lviv's great nautical past couldn't keep up with us and was left far behind.

A longing for it echoes to this day—for example, along Black Sea Street, smack in the center of the Older City. Not the Old City, but the even Older one—the one where Old Rynok is to be found and towards which Fish Street runs.

Lviv's sealess state turned into a waterless condition. Water became its drama and its karma. Existence became existential, a dreary campaign involving toilets and dishwater, waiting and listening for *when they'll turn it on and when they'll turn it off* and, finally, a drawn-out dripping of hours and years among mountains of dirty dishes and overfilled ashtrays, with a stubborn stone in your throat and sharp sand on your teeth. Life became a dying in never-laundered, sticky bedsheets. A foul stench became an indispensable element of everyday life—it crawled into dwellings as if into prison cells and never left.

It is in Lviv that I first understood the meaning of the saying “to capture the water.” It really was a hunt, that endless filling up of the bathtub with rust stains on its sides, those buckets and basins set up all over the place and all filled to the rim. This was hunting for water and keeping it captive. And then, letting it go—downward into the sewage pipes, down to the eels and rats, to the underground port in the estuary of the great river, homeward.

Crossroad City

This designation refers to the intersection of not only space but also of time. Thus, a crossroad is also a layering. A list of the ancient trade routes that brushed by Lviv in one way or another would not fit on the pages of this book. Lviv was conceived not only in the midst of ages but also in the middle of lands. Trade from Europe came through it on its way to Asia and trade from Asia on its way to Europe, although, in those times, Europe and even more Asia were as yet unknown concepts, and all that was known was the Old World. Besides, the very existence of Lviv triggered the subsequent division of the continent into Europe and Asia.

The city was so ideally positioned that neither caravans going from Britain to Persia nor caravans going from Korea to Portugal could avoid it. You had to go through Lviv to get from Moscow to Rome or from Amsterdam to Bombay. And not all travelers simply paused temporarily at this intersection point. Some unexpectedly decided to remain there forever. Among them were not only merchants but also traveling musicians, sermonizers, deserters from various armies, spies, soothsayers, scholars, teachers, healers, escaped slaves, and fugitive freemen. I once tried to put together a list of them all but had to stop when I realized it would be endless.

In the mid-19th century, when Austrian engineering authorities were selecting a site where to build a central train station, they were able to reach a consensus swiftly. The central train station was constructed along the line of Europe's Central watershed, that is, at a height of 316 meters above the two closest seas. Although the word for "watershed" in Ukrainian is *vododil*, the second root of which, *dil*, implies a breaking apart or division, I would once again prefer to approach this from the other side. A watershed is a geological part of the earth's surface that can be seen not only as an edge but also as a stitch, one that binds seams together, connects, and unites.

That is why Lviv is (as I have already written) a joint endeavor of both the West and the East. This time let me add that it is one of the North and the South as well.

This could best be conveyed in a novel about strange metaphysical merchants who, having gathered in some Lviv pub, take turns telling tales about the most distant worlds. They form a circle, in which each of the merchants picks up the story line from the previous storyteller, employing his motifs. What is key is that this chain of storytelling is never interrupted. If that were to happen, everything would disappear, blow away, and scatter. Thus, the novel has neither an end nor a beginning—one can start reading it on any page. It is imperative to complete the cycle and return once again to that same page, to realize that there's now a different story at that spot, because while the reader was making his way along the circle, some of the storytellers left, taking their stories with them, and new ones had taken their place. A novel like that could contain everything in it—just as Lviv can. The name of that novel: "Rotations."

Circus City

Any crossroad tends to attract eccentric spectacles (known as eccentracles) and eccentric people. The city of

Lviv doesn’t just attract them—it sucks them in.

It began with the beggars and the cripples. As if on some kind of secret mission, they crawled into Lviv during the first few centuries in such great numbers that the city leaders had to allot them all of Cripple Mountain, where they were kept in cages by Lilliputians (in wintertime they were split between monasteries and hospitals). The city provided them with Sunday and holiday dinners, always accompanied by several barrels of Italian wine sweetened with spirits. In return, the thankful beggars would provide the city dwellers with jesters’ processions (“cripple manifestations”) and entertaining dances by the legless on Ferdinand Square. No less entertaining for the residents of Lviv were the beggars’ concerts (“hobo choirs”) that were accompanied by a quartet of blind cellists enhanced by a small and portable military organ, a trophy from the environs of Grunwald.

Lviv’s golden years coincided with an era of great geographic discoveries, when the people of the Old World came to realize, in awe, how exotic real life could be. It was then that pioneering showmen would occasionally appear by the city walls with their curiosities on display. Someone pulled up with an Indian savage in a cage, someone with a couple of lemurs, and someone else with a wagon filled with minerals, shellfish, and embryos. A special decree dating from the end of the 16th century allowed them to enter the city. As for zoos, they were allotted enough space in Pohulianka (not yet a park but a forest on the edge of the city). There the animals could drink from the wells of the Poltva, more accurately, from its tributary—the Pasika. Beginning in the second quarter of the 17th century, Pohulianka, was filled with the roars and howls of hundreds of fantastic creatures, like a tropical jungle. Its green glades were crushed by stomping hippopotami, elephants, and rhinos. Panthers and cheetahs loped among the trees. Hour after hour, parrots and monkeys squabbled and hissed high in the treetops.

Around that time, close to the middle of the 17th century, the traveling circus “Vagabundo” made its first stop in Lviv—a wonderfully vibrant international throng of all kinds of curiosities, which did not leave the boundaries of Central Europe for three hundred years afterward, even if it would occasionally disappear for entire decades. Anything and everything that is known about the circus can be shared in a few sentences. It had a dynastic structure—as a result, its actors had one and the same surname for centuries. Its directors were always appointed by an Investor,[10] an individual never seen by anyone because he controlled everything while remaining in the Swiss canton of Valais, in the fatherland of the circus trade. The last of the directors, Ananda, launched an unprecedented coup and, removing the reigning Investor, personally took over the circus. But this happened just before the days of the final collapse, when all its troupes were forced to save themselves from political repression by escaping overseas.

A novel about their last days could simply be titled “The Vagabundo Circus.”

It could begin like this: “Anomalies wandered all over the world and could not, in any manner, avoid Lviv. The anomalies were drawn to the greatest of anomalies, which had the name Lviv.”

From Lem’s *Highcastle* we know that, in his youth, he saw the final relics of the “Vagabundo.” He remembers how “countless tricksters would wander through the courtyards in those days eating fire, together with acrobats, singers and musicians, and also authentic organ grinders, some even with parrots picking fortune cards.” It is true that in the period described by Lem, a certain number of actors were expelled from the circus.

The expelled imposters (and the novel is about them) take over the circus archive, which contains the following:

- magic instructions for sorcerer and hypnotic séances

- secret plans for underground connections between the prisons, monasteries, fortresses, and banks of the 111 most important cities
- several dozen maps, handmade and printed, indicating the locations of the most famous buried treasures
- thousands of pages of incriminating evidence against prominent city officials and politicians of all eras
- other esoteric things—examples: magic wands, vinyl records featuring the voices of spirits, witches' mirrors on which one can see porno-films, mandragora roots that were gathered by the gallows on Dogcatcher Hill.

The entire "Vagabundo" circus archive fits in one suitcase. It goes without saying that this is the world's most valuable suitcase.

It is once again appropriate here to mention account of Lem, who writes about "traveling, clandestine, family circuses, which, together with all of their props (fencing foils, dumbbells, swords made for swallowing), are capable of fitting in a single suitcase, one that is quite frayed and made of imitation leather."

By the way. I saw suitcases like that in the late 1960s. But only the insane carried them. So then, back to the novel.

Obviously, a hunt for the suitcase containing the archive ensues. And at least four sides are trying to get their hands on it. They are the state security organs, a private detective bureau, an Indian brahmin preacher, and relatives of the first Investor. The imposters, who were able to sneak away and cover their tracks, finally become so tangled up in their own conspiratorial deeds that they lose the suitcase at a city dump near Zbyranka and Hrybovychi, where it gets picked through by tramps.

In the novel, the city transforms into a permanent hypnotic séance or one big attraction, suspiciously cheap and democratically open to all, with a park orchestra, jazz

music, the first sound cinema, and mechanical dolls. In the novel, the city appears as head-spinning carousels, a ghosts' palace, a barrel of laughs, a string of funhouse mirrors, endless kiosks, and offices where naïve and enchanted souls of the suburban proletariat are bought and sold.

In the final scene, it turns out that the city is actually a flea circus and that all the novel's conflicts are just the hallucinations of a schoolboy sick with scarlet fever who is playing hooky in an amusement park and wanders into an entertainment pavilion where he becomes engrossed in watching a performance of trained fleas.

Swindler City

Lviv and money are an everlasting topic.

Money follows temptations. If a city fills up with temptations, then money also enters. The more temptations—bars, bordellos, circuses, and casinos—the more money. After it reaches a certain peak, it begins to work in the opposite direction. Temptations give birth to money and money to temptations. Later, they—the temptations and the money— begin to identify with one another. The accumulation of money ceases to mean anything and itself becomes the goal, one that cannot be inhibited by death or inflation. And that is exactly what happened to Lviv. There, money was uncoupled from existence and rose above it as a particular absolute.

In fact, because it is located in an unhappy part of the world, Lviv is generally a poor city. Being at the crossroads of all trade routes, as it turns out, does not guarantee you substantial wealth. Especially if you are passed along hand-to-hand (another Kyiv?) twenty times a century and those hands do nothing but strip you down to your last thread.

The combination of the cult of money and poverty is very undesirable.

And it is because of this that an inversion of values came to Lviv, and basic human needs—a roof over one's head, water flowing from a faucet, heating, the minimal arrangements necessary to go about daily life—came to be regarded as temptations. Exploiting these needs became a favorite pastime for several generations. In that manner, In Lviv there emerged an entire class of the city's inhabitants that exists solely from deceiving their fellow losers. The expensiveness of Lviv, never justified and always brazen, became the leading theme of every single letter, dispatch, and report that shocked visitors sent and continue to send worldwide.

Imagine what would happen if Lviv could attract even more visitors. If it had a hundredth of the allure that Venice has, one-twentieth of Prague's, one-tenth of Vienna's!

(By the way, there is another connection to the first of these cities—through cheating. And as familiar and accepted as Venice's cheating is, so Lviv's cheating is absurd. And thus, Lviv's swindling is now an art for art's sake—that is, cheating for the sake of cheating.)

But if it were all only just about prices! It is a matter of honor for every Lviv dealer not only to rip you off but also to screw you over as much as possible.

Lviv, beyond any doubt, is a city with its own criminal character. Researchers,[11] however, note a predominance of soft (mild) crimes and list its four versions:

- the just-mentioned cheating in its maximum amplitude—from marked cards to the selling of real estate that does not exist
- counterfeiting, forgeries—even of completely unexpected things; not just coins, precious gems, or valuable paper, which everyone has already gotten used to, but also, for example, wax, oils, Persian rugs, rare reptiles, cocaine, other medications
- hooliganism
- prostitution

I don’t know if the last two are considered crimes—in my view, on their own, they are not, although they do border on crime situationally. Instead, I would add here a mild fifth form—murder by poisoning. Although it can be seen as a subspecies of counterfeiting and forgeries, it takes on its own significance because of the fatalistic nature of its consequences. It is precisely through it that the city-dwellers of Lviv, over centuries, have developed a particular dexterity, to the extent that such poisonings are officially not even considered to be poisonings. If there were records of their actual frequency, we’d be horrified.

The direct perpetrators of these crimes are traditionally those dear and close to the victims. But they receive all that is necessary—beginning with consultations and ending with deadly concoctions—from a group of scoundrel-pharmacists who make a very considerable profit from the love of poisoning among the locals.

In a novel entitled “Lethargy”, a young ambitious detective from Vienna, right-hand man of the director of the city police—Leopold von Sacher, Sr.—notices a suspicious link between 5–7 deaths. Prominent city dignitaries leave this world, one by one, in very similar circumstances—they simply fall asleep and never wake up. Doctors always designate a weak heart as the cause of death, but this does not satisfy our detective. Moreover, through truths and untruths, butting heads with close and distant relatives, all kinds of other heirs—Jewish and Armenian loan sharks, good Catholics, envious Uniates, and, most importantly, pharmacists-competitors—he comes across a trace of that very same, rare, pharmaceutical concoction that was ingested by the dead, apparently to ease certain maladies. The detective-hero tries it on himself, taking a minimal dose—and wakes up in a coffin, in a fresh grave at the Lychakiv cemetery. This means that he too was considered to have been dead and was buried! Having been prepared for such a turn of events, he forewarned a handful of his

assistants, in the event of his possible death from “a weak heart,” to place an axe and a spade in his coffin. With their assistance, in the middle of a dark cemetery night, he smashes the coffin lid and digs himself out. And now he has a case. He quickly obtains permission from the governor-general to exhume all five, or even six, of the bodies. Each of them is found in a dramatically twisted pose which attests to them having been being buried alive. So now a path to the truth has opened—chemical analyses, together with simple sleuthing, quickly bring to trial the criminal grouping known as “The Laboratory” from the “Under the Black Eagle” and the “Under the Gold Deer” pharmacies. But that is not what is most important.

Most important are the visions that our detective experiences during his 70-hour dream in the coffin, his wandering onto the other side of being, the tribulations and hindrances of the land underground. On the final page, the reader should, for a second, suspect that, actually, the hero never did wake up. And that the successful investigation and righteous trial of the guilty are nothing but a metaphorical recollection of the concept of Judgement Day.

Executioner City

According to an ancient and very erroneous human sensibility, all crimes are corrected by a corresponding and proportional criminal justice machinery that is predicated on repressions, particularly physical violence. One executor (I will return to this word later) of the latter, among others, is the executioner. Notwithstanding their officially confirmed status as legalized killers, practitioners of this profession have never been afforded warmth or respect from their fellow citizens—in fact, the opposite was often true. Executioners were avoided at all costs. If one had to (there was no way out!) greet them, one wouldn’t shake their hand.

The function of the executioner is not so much to deliver punishment as to instill fear—that's the whole point. And every average non-criminal understands this.

In European cities executioners would be given dwellings far away from the rest of the populace. Nobody wanted to have such an unusual neighbor nearby. Anyone who has looked west from the top of Mount Mönchsberg in Salzburg knows what I mean. The lonely little cottage in the middle of the meadow personifies the melancholic isolation of the executioner's position in society.

In Lviv the executioners were settled less dramatically—for example, between the walls of the Halych Gate. "Between" means that the Halych Gate was double layered, with internal and external walls. In that manner the executioner too ended up "between"—somewhat in the city and somewhat outside it. Keeping that compromise in mind, we can suppose that, regarding the shaking of hands, Lvivites did not exactly follow the morals and imperatives of European city-dwellers. It's more likely that, upon running into the executioner, they stretched out their hand and firmly pressed his as an act of loyalty. But, having just parted with him, they would run over to one of the fountains on Rynok Square to publicly cleanse themselves.

And only Ivan Pidkova, executed in Lviv in 1577, willed that even after the executioner had cut off his head, he not dare to lay a finger on him. But Ivan Pidkova was a Lvivite only in a very narrow sense—as broad as the neck on which he was punished. In truth, he was a Cossack Hetman and a Voivode of Moldova. This explains his extravagant behavior.

I will relate the pre-history of his Lviv execution, following a text of it[12] closely but in my own words.

That ill-fated year, he and his Cossack-brethren ambushed Moldova, slyly—as it seemed to him—becoming part of another civil war in that country. After routing the Voivode Petro VI the Lame, Pidkova took Iași and proclaimed that, from that day on, he was the ruler of the land. The

Turkish Padishah Murad, who was Petro the Lame's protector, was terribly upset at this news and quickly sent a huge army to attack Pidkova. Having suddenly realized the idiocy of what he had done, Pidkova gathered his buddies and set off on an escape to the territory of the Polish Commonwealth. But as soon as he crossed the border, he was captured and sent to Lviv. The Padishah pulled back his army but wrote to King Stephen Báthory demanding a public execution for Pidkova. Otherwise, his still-assembled army would bring war to the Polish Commonwealth. The King, although he liked Pidkova, was forced to comply with this ultimatum. It is possible that he was hoping to contrive some sort of arrangement in which the execution would appear to have taken place, but Pidkova would remain alive.

Predicting this, Padishah Murad added another stipulation: the execution was to take place in the presence of his special envoy, who was later to confirm personally, to the Padishah, that it had in fact taken place. There was no way out for the King. Pidkova's fate had been determined.

The novel wrapping itself around this event will take the form of a diary whose author is that very same high-ranking envoy—a certain Mustafa, Muhammad or Ibrahim. The novel will include an account of his journey from Istanbul to Lviv and then of his several days in Lviv. The city authorities, following the King's orders, greet him with all the proper honors and throw a welcoming banquet. The Padishah's envoy's subsequent days and nights are no less eventful: ceremonial meals, card games, girl flutists and castrated boys, baths, incense, hashish. The diary's author, exceptionally observant, sensitive, and energetic, takes notes of his impressions in great detail. His jaunts through the city are like an encyclopedia compiled by an outsider. Closer to his last entry, however, an inexplicable dread begins to appear.

June 16th, 1578, arrives—the day of the public execution. The King, who, it seemed, had come to Lviv for just that

reason, leaves the city early in the morning, purportedly on a hunting trip. Rynok Square is filled with people eager to witness this spectacle of punishment. At the scaffold Pidkova is behaving impeccably and gives a menacing speech mostly about how his Cossack blood would come to splatter all over them in the end. In conclusion, he asks for two things. The first, that his brethren, after praying over and washing his dead body, to take it out of the city without impediment. The second: the executioner be forbidden to touch him. After taking a gulp of wine and saying a prayer, Pidkova was prepared for death. However, his collar got in the executioner's way. Pidkova follows the executioner's final demand and convincingly rips the collar off of his shirt. A few seconds pass and the executioner completes his task. The narrator sees everything from up-close—a special higher platform had been erected for him from which he attentively watches, surrounded by a triple circle of Tatar bodyguards.

Then something unexpected happens. Almost simultaneously with the separation of Pidkova's head and the spouting of a red fountain from his torso, the deck that had been built adjacent to City Hall—a sort of temporary grandstand from which to watch the execution—collapses under the weight of excited on-watchers. Horrific mayhem ensues, tens of people are crushed under the boards, the square erupts in in panicked pandemonium. The Padishah's envoy manages to witness a city official displaying Pidkova's head in three cardinal directions. But what happens with it, just a minute later, he is unable to see because of the raging throng and columns of dust.

The head disappears.[13] The envoy, who was to deliver it to the Padishah's feet in a special container, is now in a real bind. Aware that he has not fulfilled his mission, the Padishah's envoy (it is here that, by chance, it is revealed that he is actually a Turkified Greek-Cypriot) orders a fake head in Lviv—but, as a result of a whole chain of fatal

misunderstandings, he himself becomes the victim of his own order. By the time he finds out that it is from him that the fake Pidkova is to be constructed, it is too late to escape to safety. His Tatar bodyguards disperse, and he hears the killers' footsteps on the stairs. The final words in his diary (and thus—of the novel) turn out to be the 20th ayat of the 69th surah of the Qur'an "al-Haqqah": "I knew I would be found accountable for my deeds." The novel would have the same title as the aforementioned surah—"The Inevitable."

* * *

Like in all other cities, executioners in Lviv not only executed but also tortured. A case was considered to be closed if the accused confessed to everything. The executioner had a decisive role in the investigation process. His key mission—to act as a middleman between the judge and the accused—rendered him a most loyal servant of the former and a best buddy to the latter. The greatest occupational accomplishment for an executioner was a confession by the victim delivered not because of the use of torture, but as a result of the mere demonstration of what possible forms the torture could take. The most successful Lviv executioners were the so-called executioner-demonstrators.[14] When they retired, they liked to boast: "These hands didn't harm anybody."

By the way—regarding hands. One particular, scorching July, Viktor and I had meandered throughout waterless Lviv for several days in a row, searching for our friends, both male and female. The incidental results of this stroll through courtyards, basements, and attics were my "Traveler's Notes in July," among them "The Rib" and in it—"the hands of the last executioner after the twelfth sentence."

On one of those days, we made our way over to the Lviv Museum of the History of Illnesses, which was then known as the Museum of Pathological Anatomy. There, among

countless examples of horrifying abnormalities, such as the oversized hearts of butchers and lovers, “the sagging and bloated lungs of smokers, trumpeters, and glass-blowers,” and “the melancholy innards of drunks” (the liver!), we also saw still another noteworthy vessel, in which, preserved in formalin, were the hands of the last Lviv executioner. Legend has it that it was he who bequeathed them to the faculty of medicine and, through it, to eternity.

The fact that the abovementioned executioner designated himself to be the *last* one may seem strange. It is completely understandable that the profession of executioner has to have a chronological boundary. And being that it is a position within the magistrate—even more so. That’s probably what that good fellow, bragging about his lastness, had in mind.

But, as a calling, the executing business does not have chronological boundaries. And even if you eliminate the position and profession, if you stop using the word “executioner” and replace it with “executor,” the essence of the calling does not change.

I am referring to specific research dedicated to the handling of death sentences in a Lviv prison, the notorious Brygidki. It concerns the post-war era in the USSR, up to the moment when the death penalty was finally abolished. Moreover, I learned that Lviv, and its Brygidki, was the only place in Soviet Western Ukraine where death sentences were carried out. Not Franyk, not Chernivtsi, not Kolomyia, not Lutsk, not Drohobych, not Uzhhorod.

“The condemned were held in post No. 1,” the authors of the research write, “each in their own cell. The executions would take place during the day, but only when an especially selected team was scheduled to do the work (there it is—that calling! – *Auth.*). The prisoner was not informed. One of the controllers-executors would lead him from his cell. The prisoner seldom had any suspicions regarding when “the time had come” because they were

regularly taken out of their cells. The handcuffs would rattle behind their backs. If one looks at the prison building from Horodotska St. (yes, I looked! – *Auth.*), then Post No. 1 is on the right, on the first floor. The convict was led down a corridor to the other side of the building though special doors in the wall (they are now walled in). The corridor was utilized so that the condemned would not be led past everyone on the way to his execution. The controller would carry on a conversation with him, would joke around (there's that best buddy! — *Auth.*), in order to distract him and erase any suspicion. Along the way, they passed several other doors, until they got to a set of stairs that led up. And there, under the grating and the stairs, was a small entrance into a basement. The prisoner was led down into it, where members of a commission awaited him. The basement was small and had three rooms. In the first was a table and two or three chairs. The members of the commission, following procedure, would ask the convict for his basic personal information and then they informed him that his appeal for amnesty had been rejected and that the sentence would now be carried out. Before he realized what was happening, the convict was taken by two controllers to the neighboring room, in which the executor awaited. And before the prisoner got to the center of the room a shot rang out. In the Lviv prison, service weapons, including the Makarov pistol, were not utilized because of its strong ricochet. Such shootings were made with a small caliber rifle. The executor rarely had to shoot twice (professionalism – *Auth.*). The first shot to the back of the head was fatal. The members of the commission would verify the death (this was often done by a doctor) and would sign a certificate that confirmed the carrying out of the death sentence. As hardship pay, they each received a couple of extra rubles, but if that was spent on a bottle of booze, then there wouldn't be anything left over for accompanying snacks. However, their salaries and bonuses were decent. And you'd be issued an apartment

without having to be on a waiting list (and it wouldn't be some small shack on the edge of town! – *Auth.*). Sometimes a few death sentences were performed simultaneously and, in those cases, the third room would be utilized. While the controller was fetching the next prisoner sentenced to death, the corpse would be pulled into that room and the blood would be hosed down (and for this, water in Lviv was always available! – *Auth.*). The corpses were buried in a so-called special-zone, located in a village near Lviv. The authorities have recently sold this tract of land for the construction of some kind of new development (those living there now must surely be lucky—living on top of bones! Or perhaps it's the site of a new stadium? – *Auth.*). The corpses were taken away by car. They were not washed, but their heads were wrapped in cloths, so that the car's interior wouldn't get splattered with blood. The special-zone was a closed off area and a someone constantly stood guard there."[15]

And that man will be the protagonist of another novel. It will be the intimate notes of this special-zone guard. Coming from an old dynasty of executioners, he dreams of becoming an executor, but the authorities don't trust him—if only because he is *iz miestnykh*.[16] So he grabs hold of whatever he can, for the chance to at least in some way be involved in executions. And that is why he spends his days and nights at the special-zone, burying corpses and then watching over them.

That same research about him has this to say: "He would dig the graves ahead of time. He dug them under the roof of a shed constructed specifically for this; the car would drive right up to it and no one would see what (is it now a "what," not a "who"? — *Auth.*) was unloaded from it. They would be buried without coffins. When the center of the field got filled with graves (it is he who filled them — *Auth.*), then the shed would be dismantled and reconstructed nearby. In this manner it would move across the whole special-zone. The

graves were made level with the ground, leaving no visible signs of their existence. The place of burial was not made know to the families.”

A while later, regarding the end of a wonderful era: “Towards the end of the ’80s, the democrats, headed by Chornovil,[17] asked if there were any special-zones in the Lviv region. Immediately there came the command from Kyiv to suspend all executions. And from then on, there were no more shootings-executions at the Lviv prison.”

From then on, Lviv loses a part of its essence: it ceases to be an executioner.

At the end of the novel, the protagonist from the special-zone does end up executing a sentence—his own. There are no more shootings, new construction slowly arises on all sides. He loses the tiniest thread of sense that tied him to existence. He has no one left but the executed. But they too are gone.

Victim City

This is a little addendum to the definition above—its opposite side and reflection.

Killings always took place in Lviv. But sometimes these killings would be massive. In truth, this lightheartedly friendly, café-strewn, and beer-filled city is a horrific pit full of human bodies. In the older districts every stone should be screaming.

Lviv is an intersection of languages, religions, and ethnicities. It’s a layering of cultures. You’ve already read about this.

However, to a much greater extent Lviv is the heaping together of anti-cultures. And there was never harmony there. If a relatively peaceful period did occur, then it only hung by a thread. Or perhaps on a spider’s web. But this spider’s web was spun not in Lviv.

The mutual, ethnic-confessional hatred, held in check only by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, burst out of control together with its—that is, Austro-Hungary's—demise. Following the social revolutions and upheavals in Russia and Europe, a class hatred was added to the ethnic-confessional one.

In the first half of the 20th century Lviv is a war between everyone and everyone else. Otherness (linguistic or ritualistic) becomes a reason for ridicule and animosity, and later, utilizing acts of wartime, for repression, with the goal of completely removing the others. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth—the only functioning slogan and the only motivation for relationships. Each side wants a purge of the others. If not assimilation, then at least marginalization. A further variation of this *cleansing oneself of the others* was decisively announcing, or even effecting, the removal of other groups from beyond the boundaries of the city:

- of the Ukrainians—by the Poles
- of the Jews—by the Germans, the Poles, and the Ukrainians
- of the Poles—by the Soviet Russians, the Soviet Ukrainians, and the Soviet Jews
- of the Western Ukrainians—by them as well.

Fighting within Lviv was, of course, manipulated from the outside. Let us not forget that Lviv, like the rest of the part of the world it belongs to, is located between Germany and Russia. Both of these imperialisms played their own part. By the middle of the century the city had lost almost all of its previous inhabitants. As a result, there would seem to be a decrease in the amount of hatred in the city. But it simultaneously saw a decrease in the number of languages, cultures, and continuities—the last decreased catastrophically.

All those whom I so miss in the city were either murdered, or they escaped, or they could endure no longer endure, or were never born.

For a city like Lviv, which is not so large, there are too many accursed places.

Their names—the Prison on Łącki St., Brygidki, Stalag 328—the Citadel, the Yaniv concentration camp, the ghetto, the Lysynets forest.

Once you realize how many of them there are, you finally cease asking: why is there always the sense here that these city-dwellers came to take the place of someone else?

Patriot City

Patriotism, writes my old army buddy Rost to me in a letter from Toronto, is territorial, while nationalism is cultural-linguistic.

Each of the sides of Lviv's polygon of hatred were made up of patriots of their city. They all loved its territory, loving it sincerely and devotedly. But then why is Lviv so misfortunate, why are there so many accursed places?

The dominant historical drama that runs through Lviv over the centuries is the battle for "national proprietorship," mostly Polish-Ukrainian. Whose city is it? Ours or yours? Polish? Ukrainian? The battle is older than those very nations as they are defined today. It is older than the city. The city is its manifestation. It needed such a city in order to have something to dispute. Its additional components: confessional (sometimes more primal and more important than national), class, and wealth.

This main historical drama concludes with Yalta. The possibility of a future Polish Lviv ceases to exist. The Polish locals, swallowing tears and seething in anger, abandon Lviv in echelons. All that remains are the folklore of resettled Lvivites in Western Poland and the banner "ODDAJCIE LWÓW!"[18] (from a 1967 soccer game at the Ruch Stadium in Chożów between Górnik Zabrze and Dynamo Kyiv, Knockout Phase of the European Champion Clubs' Cup) accidentally caught on Soviet television.

“Give Back Lviv!”—as if it were a toy, and a sexual one at that. Or a bar rented out for two decades.

Poland lost Lviv but won the West. It became smaller, shrank, and shortened, but it got rid of its most destructive and conflicting lands. This was rescue via a strengthening of the weight of the center. Poland’s territorial mass moved westward, and Poland ceased to be an Eastern country. If at Yalta the British had bargained and got Lviv for the Poles, then Ukrainians would not have had a place from where to start. They wouldn’t have been taken into consideration at all. But then the Poles too would never have climbed out of the forsaken world.

As a result of Yalta, the primordial drama of Lviv seemingly ends in favor of the Ukrainians. But what Ukrainians, and from where? Obviously not those Ukrainians who, as a result of this apparent victory, for a quarter of a century were ending up in prison or in the Gulag or even in the other world. For whose benefit? Perhaps only for some sort of Ukrainians of the future. For those who, through the 1950s, through the conformist strivings to combine the Ukrainian with the Soviet, and, later, through the creeping Ukrainization of the 1960s, especially in Lviv, will mature into their own selves.

That already includes, to a large extent, those who in the autumn of 1969 spilled out onto the squares and streets because of (you won’t believe it—yep, once again it’s soccer!) a victory by Karpaty[19] in the Soviet Cup. (According to my father, a correspondence student at the Lviv Polytechnical Forestry Institute, they carried banners—hey, we can do that too!—on which, in huge letters, was spelled out: “LVIV GETS THE CUP! KYIV GETS THE GOLD! MOSCOW GETS ZILCH!”). Moscow was left with nothing. This is something that was not agreed upon at Yalta.

But then the USSR responded with the 1970s, that is, with repressions. When, in 1971, the graves of Sich Riflemen[20] were being leveled by bulldozers at the Yaniv

Cemetery, the system was already preparing massive arrests, searches, prosecutions, campaigns—all those things that, having not killed Lviv, made it stronger.

Dissident City

Having taken away from the Poles their last hope for Lviv, Stalin must have understood, and definitely did understand, that he was now in a prickly situation. What he didn't understand were perspectives. He had been very successful in vanquishing all things Ukrainian in the past, and so it should have been the same with Lviv: an optimally dosed mixing of repressions with free medicine and education. However, like all dictators inclined towards megalomania, he did not take into account at all that he would soon die. His successors would successfully ruin everything.

In the wasp nest that was Lviv things were getting increasingly testy. The underground, which seemed to have been systematically uncovered and wiped out, nonetheless never fully disappeared but would instead take on new forms and be personified by new individuals. The city turned out to be a temporarily compressed spring. Despite an atmosphere full of rumors, suspicions, denunciations, whispering and listening-in, provocations, butting heads and, ultimately, betrayals, Lviv was always suspended in a yoga-like pose of patience. The key was to hold on until better times. In Lviv this was known as "Long live Soviet rule and we right next to it." However, better times don't just arrive on their own—they need to be summoned and invited, and not only by thinking differently but also by speaking differently. Sometimes—by shouting differently.

The appearance of a whole community of leaders-dissidents was, of course, not just a Lviv phenomenon. Dissidents appeared from everywhere, even from the seemingly helpless South and from the Donbas. But only in Lviv were these individuals—these tested and,

simultaneously seemingly compromised survivors of prisons and psych wards—able to bring hundreds of thousands of followers with them to the squares and streets.

Lviv is the response to the painful and neglected need to have *My City*. At the beginning of the 1980s, when everything was just starting, Mykola Riabchuk, then still a poet, perceived it as “our city, one and only.” Actually, here is the poem in its entirety—let everything begin again with it:

> Finally, they’ve collected the trash. They’ve shoveled
> the snow. And the streets are empty.
> And we, the forgotten rovers of the night,
> turn to the narrow streets.
>
> Because only here is winter found. Because only here
> tattered Christmas trees still lie,
> dented ornaments, lemon peels,
> a festive carnival of clutter.
>
> And time flows slowly. It doesn’t flow—
> it lies, like the snow, awaiting a sound—
> not voices, not clanking steps,
> not the rustling of shoulders brushing by.
>
> Sense it and say the word,
> let time and snow move on, in an avalanche—
> our city, one and only,
> like affection and affliction, and once again—affliction.
>
> What a harsh and incessant sound!
> How it will haunt both our dreams!
> Like a sharp nail, like a pine’s needles,
> that prick the hands and crumble away.

Cemetery City

In the penultimate stanza of the poem cited above affliction surfaces not once but twice in one line. Of course, there is something of a literary pun at play here, as it is whenever “affliction” is regarded simply as a word that forms a most banal rhyme with “affection,” and the latter is also taken to be simply a word.[21] But suddenly they stop being simply words. This city, *our* city, the one and only is an adage that is radical and even edgy. The affliction that is mentioned twice—now without quotation marks, and now in no way simply a rhyme—is yet another evocation of Lviv as victim.

In places where there are so many victims, burials take on a special meaning: there are more of the dead here than there are of the living. At times the significance of city cemeteries becomes greater than the significance of the city itself.

No, I am not saying that an increase in signs of decay, including an increasingly noticeable discordance between the inhabitants and the city in which they live, will inevitably end in ruin. Maybe not. Maybe it’s too early to write about the city as hospice.

But it is indeed time to write about the city-cemetery, as about a past more alive than the present. When, in 1978, we spent several hours circling the unkempt alleys and faded pathways of the Yaniv cemetery (there were five of us, all of us eighteen), it all had to do with Antonych’s grave.[22] Actually, it was about us, ourselves—the fact that we had begun to live. We needed some kind of an initiation. We searched for our mystical sense. And when the almost impossible happened—that is, when we found it, it became like a confirmation or an inspiring sign. Because, on that day, we did not find something—we found ourselves.

The Lychakiv cemetery is a city within a city. Moreover, as always, it is only the internal city that turns out to be real. And, in fact, it shoulders the whole weight of Lviv’s

existence. Lychakiv is harmony among the deceased. They all co-exist ideally, all together and so close to one another—Banach and Kotsko, Gorgolewski and Levynskyi, Zapolska and Krushelnytska, Grottger and Trush, Jan Zahradnik and Nazar Honchar, Franko and Smolka, Shashkevych and Goszczyński, Konopnicka and Rudnytska, insurgents and archbishops, astrologers and chaplains, revolutionaries and pilots, the victims of Thalerhof, Bereza, Brygidki and all the other victims and the victims of those other victims.[23]

Sometimes you would like to see others among them as well, because they really are lacking there. For example, Wittlin, Kuroń, or, say, Giacomo Joyce and Jim Morrison. Above all—Admiral Yaroslav Okunevsky. Where is his Austria-Hungary? Where is that Austro-Hungarian navy he commanded? It would be good if a golden tomb the size of an ocean liner arose at Lychakiv.[24]

Then Karol Bauer, the university botanist, could touch these Lviv seamen with his long, green finger-sprouts.[25] And it is about him that yet another novel should be written, "Harmony Among the Deceased"—about how flowers, bushes, and trees are planted, gradually transforming the cemetery into a paradise, and memory into hope.

In the novel's epilogue there's a sweet couple—Yka and me. I didn't want us to be seen, so I chose the cemetery as our place to meet. In other words—paradise. Only towards the end of April and among the graves does it get so green. Exhausted by the sun, the closeness, the birds and sweat, we could no longer talk. And we didn't even know what to talk about or why. All there was left to do was touch one another (the lower lip trembles!)—as it turns out, at the base of the Eaglets' Memorial.[26]

Simulacrum City

In just five of my student years in Lviv, three films were shot there in which the city pretended to be someplace else. That began with “Boyarski and the Three Musketeers” (Paris and another France), continued with “The Gadfly” (Rome and another Italy), and, almost-simultaneously, the Georgian comedy “Tiflis—Paris and Back” (Paris again, as the title implies).

For some reason, we were rather openly proud of this. In the USSR, from which one couldn’t generally travel to the real Paris, even this could serve as a reason to be proud. The local press, for the first time in the Soviet period, began to refer to the city as Little Paris. Actually, that is what Leipzig is called, along with several thousand other, predominantly German, cities. On the other hand, no one has ever called Paris Big Leipzig or Big Lviv. And even Vienna hasn’t been referred to by anyone as Big Lemberg. Besides, Little Vienna is Chernivtsi.

To be honest, Lviv is a provincial city, little-known in the world, that sees itself as a famous metropolis. Its ambitions are embodied mostly on the outside—pretending and imagining itself, as well as convincing itself what it is. In Soviet times, it was recognized as one of four European cities in the USSR. Lviv was a replacement for places to which it was impossible to go—there was no chance. It shattered into fragments of all kinds of Parises, Romes, Pragues, and Budapests, intensely simulating the West in any way it could. I think that is what its secret mission was—one that it performed heroically. Educated Lvivites loved to come up with arguments (unfortunately, the same ones over and over) that were supposed to raise Lviv’s standing in anybody’s eyes. Among them:

- according to UNESCO, the Rynok Square ensemble is one of the five most notable town squares of the Renaissance;
- the cupola of the Dominican Church is an exact copy of the cupola of Rome’s St. Peter’s Cathedral, although two

and a half times smaller;
- the Old City was planned and built to exactly resemble Florence;
- the Opera House has been officially designated a perfect crowning achievement of architectural perfection and in this is only second to—attention!—Milan's La Scala;
- to his final day Napoleon truly regretted that after his victory at Austerlitz, he did not proceed to Lviv;
- Lychakiv Cemetery is older than Paris's Père Lachaise;
- a certain Professor Brettschneider, a learned librarian, upon coming to Lviv at the university's invitation, noted: "I've never seen a city so dedicated to debauchery. There are so many whores here that, compared to this Babylon, Berlin is Jerusalem;"
- at various times Mozart Jr., Giacomo Casanova, Count Cagliostro, Honor*é* de Balzac, and Vladimir Lenin stayed in the city.
- The last of these persons, to be truthful, was not recalled with very much pride, but he nonetheless was never forgotten. That is how it was then.

And that is the way it is today, for the most part. Lviv still strives to be compared to, placed side-by-side, and interrelated with somewhere else. It's as though the city does not believe in its own self-sufficiency. I know that in order to feel more self-confident, it becomes many different cities. Once, at night, I became completely disoriented in the area between Pekarska Street and Levytskyi Street. Then I felt like it was Munich, only with much poorer lighting and completely lacking the smell of roasted chestnuts and not completely lacking the odor of vomit and dog shit. It's a good thing that a couple of my buddies were with me, and I didn't lose my way in search of the S-Bahn heading toward Starnberg.

Sometimes it's Odesa. That happens when it once again seems that if you look just past those distant buildings, you

can catch a glimpse of the sea or, at least, a bit of the port.

Sometimes it's Kaliningrad. Sometimes Trieste.

But ever more often Kryvyi Rih, Kramatorsk, or Nikopol.

And most often—a city without a name. That is—without distinctiveness. Two-thirds of it (some would say seven-eighths) is still taken up by the unimaginable, shabby buildings of the Horodok, Zhovkva and Lychakiv suburbs. From what years, times, eras does it date? Pre-war or post-war? If post-war then post-which-war? And is it not from that Lviv that Professor Mieczysław Orłowicz, in his guide-book, tries to shield us when he advises that we "stay away from third-rate, dirty Jewish hotels in the suburbs"?

"But without them it wouldn't exist at all," I would say in answer to the professor, had he not died in Warsaw the year before I was born. "And it is together with them that it finally, truly, becomes its own self, not pretending to be, or copying, anything else."

Phantasm City

My favorite novel will be all about wandering. The protagonist will enter an endlessly long labyrinth at night-time, having earlier swallowed, for example, Trihexyphenidyl. In his city he will search for all other cities—their parts, fragments, and reflections. He will find them there. His Lviv will grow before his eyes, and it will finally seem to be the largest Lviv in the world. The protagonist will run along its inflated surface and will skate upon its glass sidewalks. Going from one neighborhood to another, the protagonist will actually be traversing many different countries—a little bit of Armenia, a bit of Greece, or even Ethiopia. Countless sushi bars will elicit thoughts of Tokyo or Kyoto. He will end up having to converse with plants and animals, and to acquire fifty or sixty languages in order to do so. The real city will be layered with visions—St. George's Cathedral will end up on the back of a whale, one that has

been covered with grapevines, High Castle Hill will become Mont Blanc, and the Cunard Line's ocean liners *Lusitania* and *Mauretania* will sail down Akademichna Street's riverbed. At dawn, at the first rooster's crow, the protagonist will make it into the local pub, where strange merchants simply cannot finish any one of their stories.

Translated by Mark Andryczyk

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Crossing The Sea

Olha Kobylianska

At dawn the day already shone bright.

So bright and sunny that the sky, which on clear days was usually a deep blue, was reflecting itself in the sea in a perfect sky-blue. So bright and sunny that the blue sea itself sparkled with silver, looking serene and boastful. Its waves frolicked merrily and raced one past the other, as if in noisy agreement to rush joyfully to shore forevermore.

On the shore stood two white seagulls—a larger and a smaller—locked in argument.

“I must cross the sea!” declared the larger. “I absolutely must! I have to stand on the high cliff that’s on the other side! They say the view from there is totally different from the one here. And that once you’re there, it’s impossible to return. So I must make a final decision, whether to be here or there. And I want to be there!”

“Then I want to go too!” said the smaller seagull.

“No,” said the larger. “You have to stay here!”

The smaller, offended, puffed up in anger.

“I want to fly across the sea with you too and stand on the same cliff as you! I’m a seagull too, just like you!”

“What does that matter—that you’re a gull too?” said the larger, fuming with rage and beating his wings furiously.

“You poor thing—just look at your wings!” he went on. “How can you possibly fly across this dangerous sea! Do you think the sun will always shine like it does now? That flying across the sea is like gliding around here, sailing about

above it and then turning and going back whenever you please? It is not! You have to understand that once you set out to fly across the sea, there is no turning back! And that death will be staring you in the eye every minute! Besides, I don’t want to be tied to you! You’ll collapse right in the midst of the journey, and what kind of glory will that bring? Find some other companion—I’ll fly alone! So farewell!”

And off he flew.

Sad and heavy of heart, the smaller gull remained standing on the shore. She examined her wings despondently: they looked so much weaker and smaller than those of the larger gull. She gazed out at the sea—it looked immense, boundless, and barren. She peered into the distance, where the larger seagull shone in flight like a silvery arrow. Mournfully, she spread her wings wide and set out across the sea, in the path of the larger gull.

And so they flew…

A wide expanse lay between them as the roiling sea foamed below—there was nothing playful about that sea.

“Is that you behind me?” the larger gull shouted.

“Yes—it’s me.”

“You’re flying to the cliff?”

“Yes—I’m flying there.”

“Too bad for you! And I’m telling you again right now,” he cried out to her, “I won’t be any friend of yours there! I’m flying to that cliff to be alone—for my own pleasure alone!”

“I know, I know,” she responded. “And I’m not your friend, either. I’m flying to the cliff for myself alone too.”

And on they flew…

The stronger gull flew high and straight as if pulled by a string, soaring through the air like a silvery arrow. Energetic, indefatigable, and powerful, he propelled his white breast through the invigorating air. Peering ahead far and wide, his sharp eyes calculated the distance to the looming cliff ahead.

The weaker gull flew haphazardly, at times higher and then lower, at times faster and then slower, too close to the sea's depths to gaze into the heights; when she did raise her small head, it was to glimpse where the larger gull was heading before her gaze again fell to the depths below. Time and again she felt cold splashes from the sea's murky waves, stark reminders of the frigid sea below.

From time to time the larger gull would turn and cry back to the smaller: "Remember, I will not be your friend. I am flying to the cliff for myself alone!"

"I know, I know! I'm not your friend either," the smaller called back. "I'm flying to the cliff for myself alone too!"

On and on they flew, the larger one in front, and the weaker much farther behind. The sun rose and set, days replacing nights, as down below the sea foamed and roiled, transforming itself continuously.

"You're still there, following me?" the larger one called out, veering back closer to the smaller.

"I am."

"You're not turning back?"

"No, I am not."

"I won't be able to see you back here, you know. The expanse lying ahead is so big that it will surely sap all your strength. It consumes more and more of my attention and strength. But somewhere out there, far, far off in the distance, like in a misty dream, I'm glimpsing the very cliff I so want to reach."

"I see only the depths below," said the weaker. "And within them I see Death. And alongside Death I see the sky. And between Death and the sky I see you."

"So you're not turning back?"

"I'm not turning back."

The larger, beating his wings, called back: "Just remember that I won't ever be your friend there. And that I'm flying to the cliff for my own pleasure alone."

And on they flew.

Anyone who thinks the sea is always calm and friendly, comforting and unmenacing, is greatly mistaken. It is always in motion and in flux. Suddenly, without warning, its calm and friendly surface, sparkling with silver and shimmering in tones of blue and green, can turn ominous. The sky darkens, a furious wind arises, and the sea, roaring like a giant, goes mad. Waves form in huge walls, one mounting another, rolling over and crashing, only to rise and crash into the depths once more. Time and again they arise, crash, and dissolve, creating a frenzied white foam that surges along the spine of the raging surf, only to burst and rip itself apart.

Noise…moaning…a kind of hell under a darkened sky. And above it all, the gulls still fly.

They don’t see or hear each other. They don’t meet. Beneath them lies grief.

Straining to his utmost, the larger gull streams through the air, barely staying aloft in the midst of the terrifying storm. He has never lived through a storm like this—only now does he know what a storm at sea truly is. But what has happened to the other unfortunate gull? Drowned…

“Where are you?” he called back forlornly. “Are you drowning? Have you already drowned? I’ll be blamed for your bad luck! Although I told you right from the start that I am not your friend! That I am flying to the cliff for my own pleasure!”

He listened but heard no response.

“Where are you?” he cried out again.

Again, no answer…Down below, the roiling sea was driving clusters of foam into a windswept mane that crested with every wave. But wait—over the din of those frenzied waves, from the core of that hell, a cry seemed to echo: “I am here!”

“Down there, just above the sea? I am up high, far removed from that hell!”

“And I am just above the sea depths, witnessing hell. My wings are already covered in deathly sweat, and I may be

about to die right now. I can’t fly on my own strength anymore—the sea’s madness is what is carrying me!”

“And what did I tell you?” cried the other. “Remember, I’m not to blame! I’m not your friend—I’m flying to the cliff for myself alone!”

“I know, I know—and I’m not your friend either,” the smaller called back. “I’m in flight through this hell on my own account!”

Then, nothing more. The wild storm still twisted the smaller gull’s weary wings, bending them inward and pitching her high above the depths, only to let her drop to just above the foam. Then, at last, the storm exhausted itself. Finally, its wild game had ended.

The larger gull reached the cliff. He stood on top of the cliff, and he saw that this cliff, the goal he’d strived so hard to reach, was in fact the cliff of death. Suddenly his powerful wings drooped, and the spasms of death swept through him… Some minutes later, as might be expected of one more frail, the weaker seagull arrived. The larger lay dying in agony…

“I’m glad that you made it across the water,” he whispered. “Now I won’t perish here alone!”

“I’m glad that I didn’t stay behind,” she replied softly. “Now I won’t perish back there alone.”

“Just understand,” he whispered, “that though I’m no friend of yours, in meeting Death I won’t bring you along.”

“I know,” she said. “And I’m no friend of yours either. I’ll fly on, to meet death on my own.”

Translated by Olha Rudakevych

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The Blind Man

Olha Kobylianska

I've gone blind.

There's no sense in talking about why or how it happened. Simply put, the most awful thing has happened: I've gone blind.

There was another man in the hospital blind, like me. When they let us sit together, we were content.

"Can you see even a glimmer of sunlight?" I would sometimes ask my unfortunate friend.

"No," he'd say. "And you?"

"Me neither."

Silence followed; our spirits rose to fathom one another.

Why was it so good for the two of us to be together in our misery?

Before long, my friend was released. One day he saw sunlight, and they let him go. Kind people took him in. They released me when it became clear that I would never see sunlight again. My friends presented me with a staff, and with that staff I was to manage in life.

And so I walk the earth.

What I mean to say is, I go from place to place. And even though I know that I will never see sunlight again, I still try with all my might to catch some glimpse of it.

I open my eyes so very wide—so very wide, my dear friends—in hopes of seeing at least an illusory sun…at least a speck of it…at least that! In hopes that I might see the gleam of a tiny, blessed sunbeam!… But, alas, no. I see nothing.

Nothing…

In walking from place to place, for some reason I stretch my arms out in front of me with fingers splayed and carry my head high, as if ready at any instant to catch a momentary gleam of the sun. This I do even though I know the sun will not let itself be caught—after all, it's the sun! At times it seems that my fingertips are just about to touch it—and then I realize that what I'm touching are coins offered to me as charity.

I shut my eyes, for tears have gathered there.

I shut my eyes for tears have gathered there—tender tears of acceptance and gratitude for the offering being given to me.

Spontaneous tears. I did nothing to trigger them. My soul is already dark, even though it has opened wide, as wide as my eyes. I strain to hear, it seems, some trace of the sun-filled life around me. Lowering my head despondently, I sink into the depths of my being, straining to detect even a bit of sun or light, knowing all the while that no blind man has yet caught the light of the sun with his soul, and neither will I.

Sunlight…

I call out to you! Consider that this is not the voice of an ordinary person calling out to you but the voice of a blind man. Inaudibly, without pleading in any way, as if casually… for how am I to make a plea in words like "Oh, my dear blessed sun!" and then add "I have gone blind…"? The sun shines for all.

It shines in the woods, and for people too. And where a puddle of some kind forms, the sun's sparkle reaches it too. Yet, in its age-old way, the sun never shines for the blind.

I then sink into the depths of my soul.

My soul has become as dark as it is deep. As sad as my eyes. I open my eyes before you, my friends, and you see me—but I can no longer see you! I cannot see you now, and as long as I live, I will never see you again. And I accept

that, my friends: I accept that I will never—hear me!—never in my life see you again…

For the sun, only my eyes fail to serve. But you, my friends, have never shined a true beam of light on either my eyes or my soul.

11 March 1902

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My Lilies

Olha Kobylianska

Prose poems.

Give me a desert!

A distant desert, a wide desert with a blazing sun, without any noise or life—one where I can cry.

There I will come upon no one's gaze. Neither mother's all-knowing gaze…nor father's, always ready to fight for his child's happiness, nor the pitiless, everyday gaze of a curious crowd—there I will meet no one.

There I will bury my face in the hard-baked soil, refreshing it with my tears for as long as they last, subduing me and my deep sorrow. The sun will drink my tears forever—a sun that thirsts for pain…

* * *

Trust?

Trust is a little child, with naive, innocent eyes, a child who, having gathered thoughts and feelings in its lap, runs to whoever calls.

The child holds nothing back. Laughing and crying openly—it doesn't know any better—is its natural state, its whole beauty and worth! The child waits.

Large trusting eyes, never suspecting grief, look straight into the face of whoever calls. The child waits eagerly, awaiting it knows not what. Perhaps fortune of some kind, or something else—something as lovely, magnificent, and

heavenly as its own soul, filled to overflowing with genuine pearls.

But no.

The mighty hand of disappointment rises over the child's unclouded head and falls upon it like a heavy stone. It falls on the head of the child who knows nothing of the world other than directness and truth and trust in its own sunny disposition.

* * *

Love is threefold.

The kind that thrives on tenderness, the kind that thrives on kisses, and then the mortally serious kind, which nurtures itself and others. Itself it nurtures with tears and grief, with sadness and loneliness—and, once death has come, with memory's golden, shadowy recollections of its blessed and everlasting power.

* * *

Solitude is poor?

Who can prove that?

Just listen to the torrent of tears it brings forth and how they spread! Look at the countless marble-white hands that bridge its space in convulsions of pain; look at the torn veils of hope rocking back and forth, back and forth; look at the swarms of thought crowding into it with brute force, thrashing about mercilessly and ever faster … to get where?

Dear God, to get where?

Listen!

Shut the door, huddle together, hold your breath—and listen!

A deer runs through the forest.

Through a green, airy, and lush forest, in search of something.

The deer runs, trampling and crushing flowers underfoot. The leaves of trees rustle and murmur. Within the forest, an old tree’s imposing branches sway nearly imperceptibly.

The deer has just stopped short.

Has it arrived? It doesn’t know.

It thinks it has. It darts ahead, side to side. Leaping and racing, it bounds ahead—and stops once more.

Its eyes open wide.

It stands motionless, trembling.

What was that? A shot has just rung out through the forest.

Faint sounds of something breaking, something crashing—and all coming toward it, coming toward it. Suddenly, the deer’s wide-open eyes see something they have never seen before, and its ears hear something they had never heard before. The hushed forest fills with something the deer never knew before—and blood drains from its body.

That was why it had to race through the green forest.

Listen!

Translated by Olha Rudakevych

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Archibald and Patricia

Eugenia Kononenko

It was the most dreadful day of my life. We were abandoning our family home and becoming refugees. We were amongst the last to flee from our little town. For a long time, Mother had been hoping that things would improve, but they were only getting worse. A shell struck the neighboring apartment block, one just like our own. My brother gave me a lengthy explanation about how the detonator worked, but I paid no attention; I had other things on my mind.

Uncle Neil of the local civil defense force told us: “Get in the truck and I’ll drop you off at the station. The train will be leaving at six—you don’t need tickets. It will get you out of range of the fighting. I’m driving people over today, but tomorrow you’ll have to make it to the station on foot. And by tomorrow ‘they’ may turn up.”

That “they would turn up” was the most terrible prospect of all. It was impossible to delay our departure any longer. We had long since gathered all the things we would take with us. But… but we were leaving behind those we couldn’t take, and this was the most terrible thing, too. That’s why that day really was the most dreadful day of my life.

The three of us—my mother, my brother and I, with our backpacks—sat huddled close together in the back of the truck, which was piled high with junk. We were speeding towards the station. And our Archie was racing after us. I would never have imagined he could run so fast. He was

racing more like a pedigree hound than a posh pooch. He could not understand why everyone was going away and not taking him.

The truck sped towards the station at high speed, but Archie managed to keep up. I was crying, calling out to him:

“Archie, we can’t take you with us! I’m so sorry, they won’t let us on the train with you.”

For once, my brother didn’t tell me I was a silly girl for crying like a sissy. After all, he too, a grown lad, was on the verge of tears, and he said nothing when I called out to our dog:

“Archie, my love, we’ll be back soon! All this will be over soon! Archie, love!”

My brother sat in silence. He looked away, as he could not bear to watch Archie. He was holding our Patricia. Our furry black white and ginger Patsy. But Patsy did not want to go anywhere. She was struggling and squealing – my brother was trying to comfort our furry beauty, the tiny kitten given to me as a present when I first started school.

Our Archie and Patsy were protesting desperately about what was going on in this world. But no-one was taking any notice of their canine-feline protestations. Uncle Neil drove the truck at full speed. Mother recited the Lord’s Prayer aloud, above the noise of the air rushing past the truck. I was crying and shouting to Archie. My brother was fighting back tears and struggling with Patsy, who was doing her utmost to get free. Then shooting broke out again in the distance. From the opposite direction came the welcoming din of the railway station.

Archie was lagging behind now. Our white, blue-eyed dog with reddish-brown ears was exhausted. He had been running for ages and could no longer keep up. Mother crossed herself, and I realized that this meant it would have been unbearable to keep Archie from getting on the train with us. Suddenly, Patsy deliberately scratched my brother,

causing him to cry out from the shock, and jumped off the truck as it negotiated a bend. She disappeared in the bushes by the roadside, swishing her fluffy three-coloured tail in a parting gesture. My brother started anxiously searching for a damp cloth and a bandage to cover the scratches Patsy had left on his cheek.

We caught that train, and we found one lower bunk for all three of us. Above us was a girl of about eighteen with a tiny puppy that whimpered softly all the way and allowed itself to be stroked. My brother and I got up to pet him from time to time, but could not bring ourselves to ask the girl the name of her little companion. We could not talk to anyone about Archie and Patsy. Not even that friendly girl.

We safely reached a place where there was no fighting. We spent the winter in a beautiful big city, much nicer than our village. We were lucky enough to find decent accommodation. My brother and I went to school, and my mother found a temporary job. Our father even came to visit us twice, wearing a camouflage uniform and tall boots. He and my brother had man-talk about various types of explosives and drones while my mother and I set the table.

Later, my brother and I found our own source of income too. Three times a week we spent several hours looking after a cat and a dog that could not be left on their own while the owners were at work. While my brother was out walking the Rottweiler, I sat with the British shorthair cat and told him about Archie and Patsy. The owners liked the way we looked after their pets, and we earned a little money.

Then in the spring we returned home. Things did not seem all that bad. Our building had not been blown up. The windowpanes had been knocked out in our apartment, so “they” had apparently been here. But there had been nothing to steal, so they had gone away empty-handed.

“It’s a good thing we hadn’t installed new plumbing,” said my mother, “because next door they ripped it out,

while ours is still here.”

In our village a truck was driving round with window-panes—installed on the spot. It was the same truck and the same Uncle Neil who had taken us to the station that day.

We did not find Patsy. She probably hadn’t survived. She was a domestic cat that never went out into the street. The place where she jumped from the truck was quite a long way from our home … If we had left her at home, she would have been unlikely to wait for us to return.

I try not to think about the last hours of my fluffy Patsy, who had slept so many nights lying across my feet. But I can’t help thinking of her. I imagine myself sitting in the prickly bushes by the roadside, wondering what has happened to my chair in the living room, my saucer in the kitchen, and my cozy place in the bedroom.

But Archie survived. Who fed him that winter? Maybe “they” gave him their leftovers.

But Archie did not forgive us, and he did not return to our home. He became a stray, occasionally visiting our yard, then going on to another. He wanders around our street, wanders around the school and past the silver soldier with a machine gun, the hero of the earlier, now totally unreal war. Mother tells us not to approach him. Because Archie’s white tail, which always welcomed us so happily, now droops between his hind legs. My mother said this meant Archie had caught rabies. It would be very bad if he bit you.

But Archie does not come near us anyway. My brother and I leave him food in a tin by the garbage bins. If he happens to be around, he comes and starts eating. But when we try to get near him, he runs away without finishing his meal.

I believe he will forgive us, although that is probably unlikely. I believe one day he will come and jump up to rest his forepaws on my shoulders, as he used to do. And I will look into his blue eyes—yes, our Archie’s eyes really are

blue! I will sit down on the grass behind our home, and he will rest his head on my knee, telling me what he went through that winter. “And I’ll understand your canine language, Archie!”

Translated by Patrick John Corness

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Andrii Yarylo

Eugenia Kononenko

That night was the first time the writer Yaryna Andriichuk had a dream about Andrii Yarylo. They were walking together down a long avenue, between rows of exceptionally beautiful trees displaying the golden colours of autumn, on their way to an unknown destination and exchanging some vague phrases. They both felt fantastic. Their fingers were intertwined, and this had a deeper meaning than if they had embraced. In the dream, their touching seemed very real. When she awoke, she remembered feeling the warmth of his palm in hers. A sensation that had never actually existed. Her whole being was overwhelmed by an incredible sense of lightness and closeness. Then he said: “On Saturday, we’ll see one another over there!” He pointed to a little cottage in the middle of the field that stretched beyond the row of trees lining the road. At this point, the dream was cut short. This is how bad dreams are interrupted, when the nightmare reaches its climax. Yaryna was upset. Not because she had had a bad dream, but because she did not know how it ended. She was awake now, and she could not get back to sleep. In America she often has sleepless nights.

Knowing that she would be unable to get back to sleep, she switched on the light and reached for her netbook. It’s night-time here, whereas over there dawn had long since broken. Her mailbox is already full of messages sent today. “Andrii Yarylo died today, at five in the morning.” So he had come to say goodbye. He had come illegally—the laws of

that world are quite severe. He could not stay longer. So that's why she had woken up so suddenly.

Why had he died? I don't think he was ill. It's true that about a month ago he had written: "I'm exhausted, Yaryna!" But don't we all feel utterly exhausted from time to time? Yaryna looked back through her previous emails and found the last message from him, written two weeks ago. "Nothing special. It's raining In Kyiv. What's it like where you are? How is your writing going on the other side of the ocean? My aunt was very keen to have your book—not the last one or the one before that, but the one you published right after the Orange Revolution. It's out of print. Whom can I contact to get hold of a copy? You gave me one, but people always steal your books from me." She had not replied, as the message was rather dull. Previous mails from Andrii Yarylo had been long, and sincere. After they stopped seeing one another, they began corresponding, and perhaps she put more into her letters to him than she did into her books.

Yaryna got out of bed and went into the living room, where there were several books on the shelf that she had brought with her from home. From among them she pulled out a yellowing copy of her first book of short stories, which she autographed for him but had never given him. She gave him a different copy, with the routine dedication: A souvenir for Andrii from Yaryna. Not this one, in which she had written on the first page:

Why should I sign this book for you?
recalling all we had again?
It only speaks those things anew,
once more your frenzied gasps, your pain ...

And the date—twenty years ago. She and Andrii had already had many shared memories back then. Thanks to him, Yaryna had been through everything while still a schoolgirl. She had experienced nothing new after that. All subsequent events were mere variations on those

experiences with Yarchyk in her school days. All those ups and downs, the friendships and betrayals, frequently provided frameworks for her short stories and novels. And those stories from childhood must have been very authentic, because every time she completed another story, Yaryna Andriichuk felt, albeit just briefly, a sense of having fulfilled an obligation to the force that gives us earthly life.

Even in his first years at school, Andrii Yarylo managed to convince everyone around him that he was the bee's knees. He was the darling of virtually all the girls and virtually all the teachers. Apart from the math teacher, whose favourite was Yaryna Andriichuk.

At first, they both looked down with haughty disdain on the young lover-boy hero who groaned in despair when called up to the blackboard in math class, unable to distinguish between the median of a bisector and a segment of a sector. At the time Yaryna boasted that she was not in love with that Casanova, unlike her friend Lily Maiko, who wanted to commit suicide after Andrii dropped her back in seventh grade, when she was only thirteen.

"Why did he walk me home all week! I didn't think I could mean anything to him," wept Lily to Yaryna, whom Yarchyk also tried to escort home after school. She gave him the cold shoulder, while saying she didn't go out with anyone who couldn't count to ten. He shouted after her, counting from one to ten in several languages! "Eins, zwei, drei! Four, five, six! Sept, huit, neuf!" He could count to ten! Beyond that there were calculators! And silly girl-mathematicians!

That was in grade seven. In grade eight Yaryna was constantly ill. It was a really difficult time: endless tests, screenings with faulty Soviet equipment, that awful salt-free diet. If one of her parents came to school for her homework, Andrii Yarylo was always around, and he promised to bring Yaryna whatever she needed. He visited Yaryna all year, first in hospital and then at home. Sitting next to her bed in the ward, he aroused envy in the other sick girls, even the older

ones. Later she was allowed to go out to the waiting room, and they sat on tattered hospital couches. He came twice a week, sometimes more often. That was when he told her he didn't want to be a dunce in math. As she was doing her homework, she also helped him shake off his stigma as a math moron.

At the New Year she was discharged from hospital, but her parents said she was too ill to go to a New Year's Eve party. Things turned out even better, though. Andrii Yarylo brought a tape recorder to play back for her all the music the eighth-grade students had danced to the previous evening. Her anxious parents decided that their sick daughter needed cheering up, so they did not give Andrii a hard time. At first, they kept peeping into the room where Yaryna and Andrii were circling round in a slow dance. Then they dropped off. The fourteen-year-old lovers did not betray their parents' trust. They did not even kiss; they just danced to the tape recorder until morning. But that was the night Yaryna gave herself to Andrii for good.

Until the end of eighth grade Andrii kept bringing Yaryna her homework and taking her completed work back to school. Her parents sent her to a health resort for the summer. On the first day of school in grade nine, Andrii shared a desk with Lily Maiko.

For several days that autumn, Yaryna went through hell, except that, unlike Lily, she was not contemplating suicide but rather how to kill him, the betraying weasel. She was seriously working out how to do it. What saved the day? Her burning desire to outshine him in their literature class, where Yarchyk was unsurpassed. On the other hand, he did not develop any further and remained on the level of outstanding student in grade school literature class. However, the teachers knew what they were doing when they set up a career-oriented system at school, harnessing as the driving force not thirst for knowledge but enthusiasm to be the best performer. To this day Yaryna still remembers

the extended poem by Shevchenko she learned by heart at that time, and the books about his works she read, so as to be able to respond in the literature lessons better than that upstart Yarylo who had betrayed her. If she had been kissing him in the corners as Lily Maiko did, she would not have achieved that painful leap in knowledge, not only about Shevchenko, but about herself and about something else very important as well.

“How insightful! A woman rescued from unrequited love, achieving a higher professional status than the lover she grieved over!” said a reader who telephoned Yaryna Andriichuk on a live call-in show, fascinated by her story named after a line from Shevchenko: “In Vilnius, that famous city.”

“Andrii Yarylo liberated many of us from the girlish reserve instilled in us by family and school! Here’s to you, Andrii!” Lily, née Maiko, toasted him, raising her glass on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of their graduation.

“So you lost your virginity to him?” asked Yaryna, who was sitting next to her school friend at that reunion.

“Oh no, no way! But I did go around with that boy wonder for some time, and he was the one who gave me my confidence, actually.” After Andrii’s second betrayal, Lily no longer contemplated suicide; she sought solace in the company of another boy, whom she married a few years later. “By then I had acquired communication skills, so I knew how to get along with the boys! It was all thanks to him!”

When Yaryna published her novel *Communication Skills*, Lily objected, pointing out that she had not consented to the revelation of her experiences, even in literary form.

“Sue me,” replied Yaryna Andriichuk. “It’ll be good publicity for me.”

The women laughed heartily. Yaryna had not explained to her old girlfriend that the story behind *Communication Skills*

was not Lily’s but her own experience with that same Andrii Yarylo. Her friend had merely suggested an apt title. Did he and Lily have conversations like those she had with him during the year when she was seriously ill? Oh God, my hair still stands on end at the thought of the torture of that treatment. Despite all that, it was still the happiest year of her life. An extremely positive experience, inextricably linked with an equally powerful negative one. Heaven and Hell are not the nether regions and the heavens; they both co-exist in everyone’s soul, in everyone’s life.

Her relationship with Andrii did not come to an end when they left school. For several years they fell out and made up again, saw one another and made several attempts to form an adult relationship. But fate intervened. After agreeing to move into his aunt’s apartment, Yaryna spent a couple of days going out of her mind from the suspense. But Andrii met her nervously at the trolleybus stop, apologizing that his aunt’s planned journey was off. Yaryna did not want to see him for six months after that, and she did not know how to escape from this new circle of hell. Then, finally, the aunt did go away as she was supposed to, but the moment they embraced a fire started in the apartment next door, filling his aunt’s entire house with foul-smelling, acrid smoke. Yaryna kept her distance from Andrii once more, convincing herself that this time it was for good. Fate still drove them together time after time; nevertheless, it never worked out for them.

“I really love your story ‘Stood Up!’ I don’t remember, perhaps we were in adjacent beds in some hospital and I told you everything about myself?” At a meeting in the local library a woman told her of her impressions of what she had read.

Yaryna Andriichuk’s life had more to it than being stood up by Andrii Yarylo. She got married and had a son. Yes, she called the son Andrii, and his father did not object. For a start, he knew nothing about Yarchyk, and then Andrii is the

best name for a boy, after all. Later she got divorced and re-married. Both her husbands took an interest in her work. The first one jealously searched through her stories, looking for allusions to other relationships, and he got very annoyed that they were so hard to find; she must have encrypted them! The second one still makes occasional efforts to get her recognized as a popular writer for glossy magazines. He advises her to include as much mysticism and eroticism as possible in her writing. But what's the point of this eroticism, when she has never shared a bed with the man her work is actually addressed to!

The idea of what he might be like disturbed Yaryna Andriichuk for a long time. This idea became especially unbearable when Yaryna had not broken off her relationship with her ex-husband before she started a relationship with the present one. I don't compare them with one another, I compare each of them with the Andrii Yarylo of my childhood dreams, she told herself.

"Your story 'What is he like, actually?' is simply fantastic!" a university lecturer whispered to Yaryna Andriichuk after a meeting between the writer and some students. "I am very grateful that you had the courage to write about this!"

"I really like the text too," the writer replied sincerely, because just by writing it she had gotten rid of the accursed question that had tormented her ever since eighth grade: whether the teachers knew what was in the mind of an outstanding student, a medal-holder.

"Do you know you are a writer of genius, Yarka?" said Andrii Yarylo on the phone to her one day. Until then, he had at best praised the covers of her books or asked how she had managed to arrange for them to be reviewed in a reputable newspaper which everybody read. And now, Andrii Yarylo was impressed by her story "Alongside the Square," one of the few that were quite unconnected with him personally. From what layers of her unconscious had

this story come? An artist had finally discovered a previously hidden inspiration. He was creating his finest triptych at the very time when all Kyiv was bringing buckets of hot food for those standing in the Square. It was a time when everyone was involved in major events, forgetting about their personal affairs. There was more to it than that: it was a time when it was shameful to be concerned about personal affairs. Everyone had to go to the Square and shout “Yes!” He locked himself in the studio on St. Sophia Street, which leads to Independence Square, painting a triptych that had nothing to do with the Orange Revolution. But the power of the Square fuels the sacred flame of his creativity in some incomprehensible way.

“My grandfather also hid away, fervently writing the story of his life, while everyone was celebrating Victory Day. He wrote with a lead pencil in a pre-war notebook! At the time there was a tremendous, wild fervor in our society, though it did not last long. I kept this notebook of my grandfather’s. It’s a remarkable thing! But I never told you that story. Where did you dig up your storyline? Anyway, you’re such a terrific writer, not judging anyone, not praising anyone. So where are you coming from as an author, Andriichuk?”

After that phone call of his they met and spent almost the whole night wandering around Kyiv. It was like resuming, after so many years, the conversations they had had when she was ill. In those days they argued over many very adult issues, debating them at length. They also told one another about their families, about their grandparents. He told her a lot about that same aunt, pointing out her windows on the fourth floor of the building they were just passing. When he brought her home, she ventured to give him a new collection of her short stories, this time unabashed at the passionate dedication:

May all complaints about fate be in vain!

May fantastical worlds swoop into the joyful abyss!

I love you, my noble, sentimental creep!

“What makes me a creep?” You will object, insulted.

“What makes me a creep?” Andrii Yarylo wondered a few days later, really hurt as he read the dedication. “What makes me a creep? Is it just about the idiotic goings-on at my aunt’s place?”

“Because in eighth grade you visited me when I was ill so you could catch up in math. You took advantage of me.”

“Just the opposite! Mathematics was my excuse to visit a wonderful girl! I already knew then that you had a brilliant future! You really have no idea of my tenderness, actually...”

“And I don’t want to.”

Communication between them became more awkward than it had ever been. Inept dialogues led to nothing. Andrii was not living with his wife just then, although they got together again later. His disastrous longing to clarify their relationship with her tormented him several hours a day. He phoned Yaryna, trying to convince her about something, reminding her of their school days, of their dates after school, of their chance—but inevitable—meetings later on, when they both had families: “Remember, we met in the Podil, at the river port! And you were then telling me that I hadn’t read any books after I left school! Actually, I had read those you hadn’t!” Sociologically speaking, Andrii Yarylo had long since ceased to be a star in any social category; he was an unremarkable man who had also ceased to be a creative woman’s muse. Her new story, “The Sad Epilogue,” would have its readers too. But for some reason she was reluctant to publish it.

Perhaps it was only to get away from pointless conversations with Andrii Yarylo that Yaryna Andriichuk agreed to go to America with her husband for a year, for previously it had been agreed that he would go on his own while she remained in Kyiv. But here she was. Distance heals and adjusts. She began to correspond with Andrii. Then, unexpectedly, their correspondence ran into the sort of communication difficulties they had in their conversations

during her illness. She began to put more effort into her letters to him than into her story.

Her husband went to New York for a few days on business, and she was left alone in the large American house they had settled in for the year. It was just then that Andrii Yarylo appeared in her dream.

No, he wasn't asking her to follow him. She would live as long as destiny allowed. There was a great deal worth living for in her life. But she and Andrii Yarylo would meet in some other lands. After all, as Lily Maiko said, he had given them all unique communication skills. And he had also given Yaryna Andriichuk the joy of creativity, that divine state which can be appreciated only by those who knew it. But he was the cause of the greatest suffering in her life too. It was because of him that Yaryna was trying to prove something during her sleepless nights, emitting crazy impulses into the unknown, and that was hell for her, a time when she bit her hands until they bled, bitterly gritting her teeth, and shuddering as though undergoing electric shock treatment. And then she began to write a new story. The more tormenting her inner monologue became, the better the story turned out, the one Andrii Yarylo had not read much of, but which others read with great understanding.

Now it was all over. No, now it was all just beginning! Her best writing was yet to come. Because he had arranged their meeting on the other shore in a few days' time. And THERE time is non-existent. THERE no one can be stood up on a date. Her stories will involve eroticism and mysticism. But her husband will still just shrug his shoulders with a sigh. Because there is no way her writing will be suitable for glossy magazines.

Translated by Patrick John Corness[27]

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The Ghosts' Graveyard

Eugenia Kononenko

The house stood overlooking the raging sea at the edge of a sun-scorched plain and it was indecently spacious. I had stayed there in distant Soviet times, when in our country people lived three or four souls to a room. In those days, if a couple had a room to themselves, they were considered lucky. Suddenly I found myself in a residence where there were more rooms than people. This house had none of the numerous unsightly extensions which were so common in Crimean resorts. The building, which overlooked the sea, was built on a grand scale from the outset.

Slippery stone steps led straight down to the sea. There was no beach. The foaming waves crashed on the sharp rocks that menacingly surrounded anyone daring enough to venture out. The only place you could spread out beach mats was up above, next to the cliff's edge. The owner of the house, a highway engineer who left the house before dawn, could drive you to the beach in the village on his way to work. But you would still have to return on foot, and that would mean walking several kilometers in the blazing sun.

This was my most wonderful seaside holiday. Even if there was no wind, the sea below was incredibly wild and uncontrolled, and the spray splashing onto the sharp crags reached as far as the cliff's edge, just where this wonderful house stood. I don't remember whether it had a garden. I

think there were several trees. But I clearly remember the large sitting room with no windows, just a glass ceiling. And numerous doors to adjacent rooms, painted various colours.

The landlord's daughter lived in Simferopol. His son was disabled. He moved around in a wheelchair or on crutches. He was a good-looking, long-haired young man of about thirty. His legs were feeble, but they were not grotesquely misshapen or disproportionately short, like those of many disabled people I had seen on the Crimean coast. He just had poor control of his legs.

He occupied a few rooms in his father's house. I was never in his bedroom and didn't actually know what color its door was. He invited me into the library, where the windows looked north towards the steppe and the door was purple. Or into the office with the red door and windows looking out over the sea, where the walls were hung with paintings of urban landscapes.

"What use are pictures of the sea to me?" he asked. "It's always before my eyes. I don't know whether I'll ever get to a city. When it's dark outside the window I wander around these cities. Until I feel I've got my feet wet." He nodded towards a city in the rain, painted in oils.

"Which city is that?" I asked.

"I don't know. It doesn't matter. But I know very well what's round that bend in the road, and what's in the courtyards of those buildings. Until the sun sets, I look out of the window. At the steppe, or at the sea. It's no coincidence that down there by the sea, for several kilometers to the left and to the right of the cliff, swimming is not permitted. That's to keep visitors to the resort away from here. Except those we invite ourselves. There's no beach, because over there," Roman pointed to the edge of the steppe, "is the ghosts' graveyard."

"The ghosts' graveyard? What's that?"

“Over there, next to the steppe, there’s a big ghosts’ graveyard. Perhaps the biggest one in the world.”

“Do ghosts really have graveyards? Is this some sort of anomalous zone?”

Roman did not answer these questions, so I asked another one.

“Well, whose ghosts are buried in that graveyard?”

“This is the story I am working on now. But not in Russian,” he spoke the second sentence in a whisper.

“In Ukrainian?” I asked him.

Roman and I conversed in Russian. But his massive library included quite a number of books in Ukrainian. In Kyiv I knew several people who spoke Russian but wrote poetry in Ukrainian.

“No, I write in that language,” said Roman with an odd sort of smile, gesticulating in the air.

“Which one is that?”

“You’re a programmer, aren’t you? I’m sure you know that besides Fortran and PL you can write programs in code.”

“Yes, of course. I can’t do it myself, but in our office, there are lots of people who actually do write programs in code.”

“There are codes in natural languages as well, of course.”

“Are they common to all languages?”

Roman nodded and his eyes lit up. I have never seen anyone’s eyes blaze with such enthusiasm.

“And do you know that, er… proto-language?”

“Living for many years between the sea and the steppe, and even close to a ghosts’ graveyard, never setting foot elsewhere, you’ll know whatever you want to know.”

Then it occurred to me that it was not only Roman’s legs that were disabled, and I was rather scared. I did not ask what characters the codes of the proto-language were written in. I was afraid he would start showing them to me.

It was comforting to know that the mistress of the house, Roman's mother, an extremely friendly, gentle woman, was always nearby. She came to the library or to the study where Roman and I were meeting, and she would bring a jug of cold fruit drink or a weak dry wine. That woman inspired total confidence. Even if her son was crazy, her presence would ensure that he would not cause any trouble.

At supper, Roman mentioned the ghosts' graveyard, and the owner of the house, the highway engineer, said he could take me there on his day off, as it was very close by.

"What is it?" I repeated my question. "Is it an anomalous zone?"

"It's a ghosts' graveyard," replied the highway engineer. I glanced at the landlady and she nodded—that's right, a ghosts' graveyard.

"We can go there on my day off, and you'll see for yourself what it is."

Early on Saturday evening, when the scorching sun had subsided, the highway engineer reminded me of his offer. I asked whether Roman would be going. He replied that there was room for only one passenger in the cab of his truck and that Roman often went there anyway. Just the two of us went. It did not take long to drive into the middle of the peninsula—about fifteen minutes. We stopped in the middle of the steppe. At first, I didn't notice anything apart from some sort of fallen pillar in the midst of motionless yellow grass. But Roman's father nudged me towards a large hollow. I took a few steps down the gentle slope. I felt a powerful wind whining in my ears. That was all the more astonishing because there was a deathly silence in the steppe. That wind whining in the hollow drove me crazy; it did my head in.

"Don't be afraid," said Roman's father.

If it hadn't been for this man's confident voice, I really would have been scared. But his "Don't be afraid" was so

reassuring that I took several steps across the scorching ground, which just slightly, but noticeably, shifted underfoot. The whine in my ears grew louder, and I felt a momentary desire to proceed and discover the ghosts' graveyard.

"Does Roman tell all your visitors about this place?"

"I don't remember whom else he has told. He trusted you so much, you see."

"Is he really writing a book about the ghosts' graveyard?"

"It isn't a book, and he isn't writing anything down; he is creating something, though. Mother says that when I am at work, he often sleeps in the daytime but gets up in the night and goes hobbling to his study."

I did not venture to ask what was meant by "It isn't a book, and he isn't writing anything down." I had been let into some bizarre secret, but I couldn't quite grasp what it was about.

"When Roman and I come here, we sit on this hot stone. It's very beneficial for his bad legs," said the highway engineer, pointing to the fallen pillar.

"But what's this pillar doing here?" I asked, bending down to touch the fluting.

The highway engineer shrugged his shoulders.

"Roman says it's the remains of a gateway."

"So there once used to be a wall here?"

"Roman will tell you more about that. He says that if there's a gateway, a wall isn't actually necessary."

And then came my last evening in this strange house. From the blackness beyond the window came a sound; was it of the sea, or perhaps the steppe, or the whine coming from the ghosts' graveyard in the stillness of the night? I would have expected it to be eerie, but I recall enjoying how enthralling it was. Tomorrow at dawn—probably it's today by now—I would be leaving this place.

“Have you packed all your things? Well, don’t go to sleep, because you haven’t even heard the night-time sounds here. You’re leaving, and once again I’ll sleep in the daytime and at night, I’ll do the things I told you about. It requires so much effort—you’ve no idea!”

“But Roman, if you mean a book in some heavenly, angelic language, or a proto-language, don’t you think such books actually already exist, and that the authors re-create them in their own languages rather than write them?”

Roman's eyes lit up with joy. Probably because his interlocutor had touched on what disturbed him most of all. Retrieving his crutches from the back of the wheelchair, he stood up and took a few steps towards me:

“It's like this. Look.” Roman pointed to the shelves of his bookcase. “Among these books are not many that are scanned from there. But there are some. This one here, for example.” He showed me a small book; I had the impression that it was a translation into Ukrainian from Japanese. “I just had this feeling about it, although it is a translation! Whoever undertook the translation of such a book must know whether it was an original work or scanned from Heaven!”

“Evidently, most writers don’t have access to these timeless books.”

“The texts, not the books—you must use the correct words,” said Roman, slightly irritated.

“Yes, that’s right. There, they aren’t yet books. Whereas here, on Earth, there are so few good books. But in your wonderful home one can find one’s way into heavenly libraries. Nowhere else have I had such dreams; now I understand…”

I was interrupted by a crash that made me jump and I fell silent. It was Roman’s crutches falling to the floor. He stood before me, looking like a prophet, even though he was wearing a shirt and jeans, not a long gown. But his long hair, the fervor in his eyes—I had never seen such a

look on anyone’s face in real life, be it of inspiration or insanity, such intensity of feeling—no, only in world-famous paintings. He shuffled towards me with difficulty, telling me in a hoarse voice:

“Look, I am not scanning a timeless text! I am creating it! When I have created it, I will be totally drained! It will exhaust my arms, my throat, and my capacity for human speech!”

What happened next? Next, Roman’s mother came running in and supported him under his arms to prevent him falling over; I would not have known what to do with him. She dragged him to a chair, I rushed to pick up his crutches, but she said, gently yet firmly:

“Go to your room and get a little sleep. You have to travel tomorrow.”

The following day, at dawn, she came out to see me off. She gave me some pastries and a small jar of stewed fruit for the journey. The highway engineer gave me a lift to the village, where he left me to wait at the bus stop for the bus to Simferopol.

I never visited that house again. I never again had the opportunity to see Roman’s sister, whom I had met at the programming course. It was thanks to her that I had found myself in that Crimean house on the cliff top. No material trace of my stay there remains—no souvenir, no photograph. And yet, that is not true. I do have one memento, and it is actually more than that. Roman told me he always gave guests the gift of a book from the library. The one the guest chose. Unabashed, I had chosen a collection of poetry by Marina Tsvetaeva, which in those days cost more on the black market than my monthly income.

“May I?” I asked.

“You may,” said Roman, with a nonchalant shrug of the shoulders, and I accepted the book and placed it in my suitcase. When I took it out at the bus stop while waiting

for the bus to Simferopol, in the corner of a page I noticed two symbols carefully inscribed in purple ink. They were not Armenian or Georgian characters, nor were they Hebrew or Hindi letters, nor Bengali letters, and not Chinese, not Japanese, or Korean characters. They were the heavenly characters of the ancestral mother of all earthly languages, which Roman, the son of the highway engineer, used to create the text about the ghosts' graveyard. And if he has succeeded in creating it through his incredible exertions, perhaps in years to come some writer will be fortunate enough to scan it from its heavenly carriers and record it in some earthly language.

Translated by Patrick John Corness[28]

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The Girl on the Black Horse

Mykhailo Yatskiv

For Sydir Tverdokhlib

I

He got used to being alone.

The thought came more than once: to end up in a desert and see no people. He didn't complain about them, but he preferred not to see them. He could neither love them nor hate them.

When he realized that everything life offers is easily obtained, that became enough for him, and he left behind the hustle and bustle of life. So how would he now fill the boredom?

He immersed himself in eternal truths, where he found poetry and oblivion, but from time-to-time memories would awaken, diverting him from his path and darkening his world.

"Too much heart has remained in me, and it binds me to people's paths," he said then.

Year after year passed in this manner.

One afternoon he lay in his office, dissipating in boredom.

He saw nothing in the past and knew nothing of the future; in all these years, from when he was a small child until today, he was the only one in this world. He crossed his hands atop his head and searched his thoughts.

“My parents did not want me, they feared my arrival into this world, people got by without me, what am I to do with myself?”

Despair gnawed at him, like a slowly growing ulcer, and then, suddenly, a secret marvel flew in from a faraway country. He lifted his head, looked at the window, listened carefully, and went pale. The entire city had gone quiet, and a gold and red light was hovering above him. He got up and quietly went up to the window. Death had swept all life from the street, a corpse stood in one window, looking down past the curtain with glass eyes. In time, a chilling fear slowly flew in from the end of the street, deadening the silence, and behind it grumbled the stomping of horse hoofs. As the sound of horse hoofs flew in from around the corner, there appeared a girl on a black horse. She slowly rode closer and closer. Darian looked through the window, she turned into his entryway, he dragged himself over to the sofa and plopped down on it.

Slow footsteps on the stairs, the door opened, and a pale female figure entered his office and sat down next to him.

“How are you?”

He shrugged his shoulders silently.

They went out into the park.

She walked slowly, bent over and looking at the ground.

“Have you already heard,” she whispered, “that I don’t have much time left?”

“Yes, I’ve heard…but I can’t tell the difference between life and death, and besides, you can’t die.”

She smiled bitterly and waved her hand.

They sat down among the trees because she had become very tired. She started coughing, rubbed her eyes and gathered her strength. He gazed at the sun’s rays on the withered leaves as they sparkled, changed colors, and faded away.

“I’ve come—forgive me for speaking on such familiar terms—I’ve come to ask you for the greatest thing I could

ever have in my life.”

He looked at her sadness and could barely mouth a reply: “Tell me, I’ll do anything for you. I’ll give up my soul for you, just tell me—you know me.”

She listened to his voice, listened to his heart, it reminded her of their past love, she wished with all her might to once again enter his soul.

Pensively she asked: “Are you still sad? Why are you always sad? So sad that after our death your sadness will cloak seven generations?”

He remained silent.

“You are still so despondent! Today I see you as no one else in the world does. And I see how I’ve hurt you and how I destroyed your soul and mine!”

She began dropping to his feet, but he did not allow it.

“If I could give you even a sliver of cheer…”

“Tell me, what did you want to ask me?”

She gathered what was left of her strength and soul.

“I want you, the last in this world, the only one still alive in the whole dead world, to bid me farewell.”

He pulled her toward him, but she pushed him away in sick despair.

“Don’t touch me—I have death in me.”

He started babbling on excitedly, like a child.

“I am not afraid of anything, it’s all the same to me— I don’t want to, I can’t, I won’t live without you! Come back to me, my most brilliant muse, tell me how to save you—I am ready to destroy….”

“I cannot resist your will—I feel better at your breast, I will be with you forever, only don’t forget to bid me farewell…”

She fainted in his arms.

“I swear to you—I will visit you and bid you farewell.”

He lifted her up and helped her get onto the horse. He took off his hat, and with a bitter smile she said, “I see that you are quite bald already…”

“Ah yes, I’m bald, my dear, a baldy, ha ha … yet I can’t tell the difference between life and death…”

Muffled stamping echoed in the dead street as the girl disappeared into the dusk. Darian stood, smiled, and repeated his last words.

II

She lay on the veranda in an open casket, all white, like a lily on a black carpet. Garlands of wild grapes hung from the veranda, far in the corner a light on a tripod flashed, an evening deep in thought spread through the surrounding world.

Darian pressed his lips to her face lightly so as not to awaken her.

The leaves rustled in the park, her face came to life, he heard a very light whisper, as if in his soul.

“I didn’t die, but I don’t have the strength to lift myself or to open my eyes. Don’t touch me, don’t awaken death—I like it this way. I can feel you next to me, and I gaze at you through this dreamy mist, which people have understood to be death. My fate predicted this. Your strength will support me for a few more minutes. You opened love for me with your first kiss—do you remember, long ago? Now close it with your final one.”

He kissed her and whispered: “My poor dear…”

His whisper flowed with a heartfelt sparkle, like the vibration of an angelic string when a breath of evening light caresses it.

“Forgive me, forgive me for everything,” she whispered, “I am unworthy, and I’ve shattered your happiness…”

“Oh, my poor dear…”

“You were my guest, and I had nothing to offer you—just look at what I have…”

“Oh, my poor dear, my poor dear…”

“You gave me your heart, and I am taking it with me to that other world, but I have nothing to leave behind for you. I leave you, as my legacy, the magic of creativity, and it will last through your whole, lonely, sad life in this world. And the filth of my life will be washed away—I will once again be your pure angel, your guiding muse.”

“You will gaze at eternal truths, the invisible world, infernal torment and heavenly magnificence, and you will look at them as you look at the sun, because I took your heart…”

“And life on earth—my, my, how unfortunate it is, like those leaves that, in withering, whisper a prayer about life’s eternal, meaningless bustle.”

She opened her eyes and, a minute later, barely uttered: “My horse…”

* * *

Darian ran ahead.

A drunken soldier was dragging his sword, like a bird drags its broken wing, an old invalid begged on the street corner and, when no one paid attention to him, took off his medals, trampled them in the mud and staggered away, his crutches pounding on the breast of the earth. Two figures fought in the shadows, and one dragged the other into the darkness. A woman’s shriek threw knives into the dusk.

“Where is my husband? Give me back my husband!”

A deformed monstrosity with bulging eyeballs sat on a trashcan, gnawing bones and giving off muffled, hysterical laughter.

A time had arrived that goes unnoticed by humans.

Statues climbed down off of their pedestals and stumbled over to the wine tavern, in the old cemetery monks rose up, knocked the stone off the graves of nuns, and crawled down to them in search of debauchery.

The time hidden from people’s attention had arrived.

Darian ran ahead.
Sparks spilled out behind him.

Translated by Mark Andryczyk

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The Child’s Breast in the Violin

Mykhailo Yatskiv

The musician was tuning his violin, and the soft cry of a child was awakening within it. The child was sitting on bedsheets, the sorrows of the violin embraced the forest’s murmur, the wind’s shrieking in the middle of the night, and his mother’s thoughts.

In the house there was drinking, singing, and dancing.

Curly-haired heads, sweaty faces and wide, homespun sleeves flashed before the child’s eyes and, together with the singing and the stomping of dancing feet, melded together into a single large circle, spinning as in a dream while the violin took charge over all the wonder.

Mother rested her head on her hand and smiled, as if crying.

One of the strangers led her into the company and the child became uneasy. She joined the dancing circle, and the child became frightened. He calls for his mother, first quietly and then louder, but she does not hear him, does not see him; she just keeps running in the circle with the others, laughing as if crying, tearing at the child’s heart.

He cannot look at this anymore and cries, shrieking at the top of his lungs, but no one hears him, because his cry is in the violin.

Translated by Mark Andryczyk

Original publication: Mykhailo Iatskiv, “Ditocha hrud' u skryptsi,” in his *Muza na chronomu koni: Opovidannia i*

novely. Povisti. Spohady i statti. Kyiv, Dnipro, 1989, 185.

The Class (excerpt, chap. 27)

Pavlo Volvach

Pavlo had already heard that Mohammed was dead. He was shot at night outside the door of his building. Now the market vendors will be made to cough up the money for the funeral. The racketeers will visit Khomiak's neighbor from "The Amber Shop" who pays them regular tributes because his shop is registered as a private cooperative, while Khomiak runs a state-owned business and just rubs his hands in glee after each time the neighbor cries on his shoulder about the latest shakedown.

Ours is surely a strange kind of mafia, Pashok often mused. Out there in the West petty hoodlums and macaroni sellers were surely not on a first-name basis with the mafia dons. But the local *capos di tutti capi* are such regulars among the common people that everyone seems to know them by sight, as well as their girlfriends and the kids from their second marriages. Even Pikhota and Artyukh's dilapidated white Mercedes is greeted with deferential whispers. Incidentally, Mohammed's mistress lived at the Shevchenko 2 complex, and his car was often parked behind her building.

Pashok preferred the ascetic ways of old-time mobsters, which he knew only from yarns and his own imagination. Those times seemed idyllic to him, and those muggers quite affable. On coal-black nights with moonlight reflecting off the train tracks, these likeable fellows would go out on their secret business, to grease the wheel, and between jobs they'd swagger in their creased high boots all around the railroad station or *bahn*, as they used to call it.

Or they'd stroll around the park, puffing on their cigarettes between steel-capped teeth and reminisce about Siberia: "tomorrow morning we leave the jail to be transported to Vorkuta." Even their switchblades, when it got to that, stabbed bodies without pain or death, as if cutting into a mannequin.

Pohon from Charivne, himself an old thug of about fifty, had once told Pashok how in his childhood some toughs used to come to Shevchenko Park and treat the kids to ice cream and lollipops. Maybe they also killed some people, but Pohon didn't talk about that. Pashok had read how inmates in a labor camp had sawed off someone's head with a two-handed saw, but Pohon didn't mention that either.

Today the thugs are called bosses. Such was Pundyk, who hadn't even done time. To be sure, Pundyk sent a cut to the prisons for his cronies, but he himself belonged to an entirely different breed, a new social stratum. "Shopkeepers and Komsomol leaders," Pitoma sighed disapprovingly. "It's all screwed up now." But what could Uncle Vitia do about it? He was just spent material, as Prokhor called the likes of him.

A mafia was needed, Pashok was convinced, but not this kind. A mafia of his own. He'd been thinking about it for a long time and even talked to Sashko Chernenko. Some interesting guys gather around Sashko in October Square, and Sashko himself is an outstanding fellow, a born political leader. He'd been locked up in the spring for failing to make alimony payments, but lots of people demanded his release, including some dissidents from Kyiv and Lviv, so they let him out. "I've thought about this already," Sashko told Pashok, "and we're slowly working on it. But…" Sashko peered significantly into the distance. "Politically active people are, as a rule, helpless as criminals. We've got to come up with something different."

This might be true. However, the faces of many of Sashko's guys suggested otherwise. After Kapulivka, where Pashok had seen hundreds of serious types, he was convinced he was right. There was no reason why they couldn't do what Pundyk, for example, had been able to do. Rumor was that all those kiosks on Ivanov Street were no longer state owned but belonged to Pundyk, as did the marketplace itself. Pundyk acquired them on the sly, by teaming up with Katia, the store manager who has now also taken over food store No. 54—she either bought or leased it, God only knows which, because plain people, Pashok included, didn't know a damn thing about it. In any case, all they needed was to take over some business, some resource, and then there would be enough dough for that newspaper Sashko published from time to time and the flags for rallies and something else too. Pashok had only a general idea of how this could be done. But if Chernenko enlisted the support of such people as Proshka, it would instantly be serious and real. Only how do you persuade him?

Pashok prided himself on having unearthed Prokhor. He'd seen countless men like him—self-assured, arrogant, often with square jaws and tattooed backs. And like a whale straining plankton through its baleen, Pashok had sifted them all, on the lookout for someone special. And Proshka *was* special, Pashok was sure—one hundred percent. Right now, Prokhor was unoccupied, as if waiting, like a motionless animal before it jumps its prey. He had even quit his job. It was high time he tried something real big. He was certainly as good as any of the former and present underworld bosses that half the city was whispering about.

Before Mohammed there had been Chort with those two "men of honor" from Zelenyi Yar—Charlie and Pronoza. Before Chort there had been Korchma. As to those who had been earlier, Zhenia Ostrovsky talked, in low whispers,

about a Jackson, Kuchma, and Uncle Vania Kursky. Chort had recently turned up with several thugs at “Bida.” Pashok had figured Chort was no longer around—too far gone with the needle. But here he was holding a gun, barrel down, rushing from room to room looking for Yegor, who should not have picked on that kid, a minor, a son of Chort’s old buddy. Yegor had the shakes for two weeks after that visit.

Pundyk was a constant. He was only a district-wide operator, but a long-lasting one. As Yura Boyko joked, Pundyk was steady. Supa’s fortunes declined after a jaw-breaking blow he received (rather than gave) outside the grocery from no one other than Pundyk. Pundyk was a bodybuilder who didn’t follow the law of the street but a business acumen hard as steel, or, as Yura the intellectual would have put it, the considerations of economic expediency—in plain words: profit. “Watch and win!” the sprightly guys used to shout—some still did—around the district. “Just watch which way it rolls. There’s a special bonus for those with hundred percent eyesight!” They were all Pundyk’s men. They “worked” for him, as they put it. And there were no bonuses here for those who hoped to seize Fortune by his fiery tail. The marble which must surely be under this cup is, in fact, pressed between the fingers of the “bottom man,” the one who manipulates those cups on a piece of cardboard or plywood while the other cheat, the “top,” distracts the suckers making bets. Yura Sadovskyi had once been present at a celebration attended by the entire district élite—the deputy chairman of the District Council, head of the Trade Department, bosses of underground manufacturing businesses, and assorted company executives. Also among them were Pundyk and Katia the store manager. So, he had progressed beyond the marbles-and-cups stage. And Yura said that Pundyk had even made a speech at that gathering. On his part, Yura, introduced by his sweetheart, the university’s female dean, as a young *avant-garde* poet, read his poem:

“In the ancient, abysmal abode of Amazons…”—stuff like that. The public nodded approvingly. Pavlo did not understand what made Yura do something like that. *He* wouldn’t have done it for love or money. Certainly not for those fat swine. Go fuck yourselves, you bastards.

It was ages since he had last seen Muddy, thought Pashok as he watched the backs of Beck and Perinsky, who were heading somewhere—most probably to Peredatochna Street, where Beck’s large family lived. Yura had been so full of vague talk and muddy ideas that Pashok had nicknamed him Muddy. Yura’s latest idea was to write a book about the best known of the local hoods, one that would be both thoroughly documented and highly artistic. *Criminal Zaporizhzhia*—how’s that for a title? Yura had invited Pashok to coauthor it, and Pashok even got the opening line ready in his head: “Chort crossed the tracks, gravel crunching under his feet, and descended from the embankment to the village…” Maybe not Chort, but somebody else—what difference did it make? But all that was rubbish. What Pavlo was really interested in was poetry.

Pashok figured that because Muddy hadn’t made it big as a poet himself, he was always critical of others. But Yura’s views were interesting and, what’s more important, all his own, not borrowed.

“Your Kholodnyi is like a Party poet, only turned inside out. Kordun is a mumbling ninny. But Vorobiov is so amazingly interesting that it’s hard to believe he’s actually a Ukrainian bird,” preached Yura. “That’s what we need, something never heard before: the rough talk of a prophet.”

Pashok stared absentmindedly toward the playground where Pavshuk and Bludnia were still talking about something. “Rough talk from a prophet”—that sounded pretty good. That goddamned Yura, murky-headed Yura—would he ever stumble onto the right track? His parents

were common hard-working folks from the Kherson or Mykolaiv area, just one generation beyond the village. The scent of melons was still deep in the pores of their skin. When Pashok last saw Yura, the poet had Marquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch* under his armpit and laughed heartily while describing his visit to his parents' home. When he had showed up, Vovka was there distilling home brew: industrial workers were also partial to home-brewed vodka. His dad didn't unbolt the door for a half hour, he was so scared he didn't even recognize his own son through the peephole. Anyway, his parents were plain folks, and Yura was a snob and an aesthete with manicured nails who rattled on about literary groups with odd names and "lofty inarticulateness." Pashok had once come across a thick book by Yuri Lotman that was about such things, but he had found it tough going and gave up

Judging by Yura's vague hints, he had become involved in some shady business, something to do with counterfeit dollars or real estate. A highbrow swindler who reads Dali's *Diary of a Genius*, enjoys Paul Delvaux, and rhymes *avant-garde* doggerel—*pourquoi pas*? Nothing wrong with that! At least Yura was not one of the "official" versifiers from the local writers' union whose poems Pashok sometimes reads in the papers, but only if there's no dedication. For such authors had a bad habit of dedicating their pieces to steelmakers or team leaders, or to mark official anniversaries. "Stuck in newspaper mode," Muddy scoffed, "and not even in *Komsomolska pravda* but in the local Huliai-pole rag at best." Muddy had been dying to go to Moscow to meet Andrei Andreievich, as he called the Russian poet Voznesensky, but had recently cooled in his admiration for the glorious capital, not least because of his arguments with Pashok. "True, we aren't the same as the Russians, after all," he would concede somewhat reluctantly. "We are something else. We are Makhnovites."

And Pashok gladly agreed. “Makh—no—vites”—it would echo in his mind, syllable by syllable.

Translated by Ivan Kovalenko

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The Price of a Human Name

Ihor Kostetsky

The tubby gentleman furrowed his brow at a sheet of brown paper. The sheet—a list of tenants—was fastened to the door with two tacks. Having found no doorbell, the gentleman bent his finger and knocked. Then he knocked louder. “May I”—said the man—“may I see Pavlo Palii?” A woman with bluish eyebrows stood at the door. Inside the apartment someone was shouting at her in a shrill, piercing voice. “Come in,” said the woman. In the hallway, the gentleman slipped his bent finger between his lips and sucked it twice. A kylym hung in the doorway, a thick raspberry-colored fabric hung on the wall over the window. A leather ottoman. And couch. Above the couch a painting —thick yellow paint, thickly smeared. A man without a jacket, or even a vest, crept out from under the kylym and greeted the guest without taking the cigarette out of his mouth. “Pavlo Palii,” he introduced himself. “Nice to meet you,” said the tubby gentleman, and added, “I’ve come about a sensitive matter. Forgive me, I forgot to introduce myself—I’m Pavlo Palii.” “Yes, we’re both Pavlo Palii,” said the host.

“We’re both Pavlo Palii,” the visitor repeated. “Well, not exactly, because I…” The host sat on the couch cross-legged, smoking and watching his visitor doze off. “Sorry,” the visitor said, “I didn’t sleep well last night. Well, as a matter of fact I did, but…” The host propped himself up on the couch and listened. He flicked his ashes onto a small kylym on the floor. He said nothing, just listened, although

the visitor also said nearly nothing. The host was silent the way people listening to someone speak are silent. “It can’t be confirmed that we were both Pavlo Palii. May I first ask you a question?” the visitor asked. The woman appeared from behind the kylym—her knees were very high. “Which handkerchief will you take?” she asked. “Go to hell! Get lost!” cursed the host, stomping his feet at her, which forced him to uncross his legs. The guest slipped his finger between his lips and sucked it gently. “Get the hell out,” the host kept yelling in his piercing voice at the woman, who stood just as people do when someone is scolding them for the first time. Then, calmly and politely, he turned to the visitor: “What was your question?”

“Oh, yes, my question,” the visitor said. He sucked on his finger once again and pulled out a handkerchief to wipe it. “You wanted to ask me a question,” the host prompted. “A question,” the visitor repeated, looking in the direction of the kylym that was still flapping behind the woman who had left the room. “Bring me a cigarette,” the host shouted after her. “I’m not sure it’s appropriate for me to make this request.” “Go ahead—ask,” encouraged the host. “You must be from the east,” said the visitor. “Yes,” said the host. “A recent arrival?” the visitor asked, added, “I’m also from the east.”

“I’m also from the east,” the visitor repeated. “Pardon me, but I’m going to keep my hat on. My sinuses have become inflamed.” “I understand,” the host responded. “Thank you,” said the visitor, and inhaled so deeply that for a moment his nostrils stuck together. The room smelled faintly of glue. “I also came from the east—but much earlier, after World War I. But I wanted to ask you a question… You know, I’ve forgotten what dried thistle smells like—oh well, must be pleasant, yes? I just wanted to ask why you exhibited your paintings under the name Pavlo Palii.” “Take it,” said a hand holding out a cigarette from behind the kylym. “Why that one? You could’ve picked one

that didn’t get soaked—it’s all yellow,” the host said, and pinched the woman’s hand in full view of the visitor. “I have matches,” the visitor offered. From his pocket he pulled a bundle wrapped in newspaper and started unwrapping. “Don’t bother, I have matches,” said the host. “You asked why I exhibited under the name Pavlo Palii. Because that is my real name.”

“Pavlo Palii is my real name,” the host repeated. “I see,” the visitor said. “If you don’t believe me, I could show you my passport. Bring my passport,” the host ordered the woman in a thin, piercing voice. “Heavens no, you don’t have to!” exclaimed the visitor. He got up, pushed the ottoman slightly back, and sat down again. “I believe you… I just meant…I just wanted to talk about…” “Pavlo Palii is my real name,” the host insisted. “My father baptized me with that name, and I never changed it. It’s not my fault our names are identical. Judge for yourself, professor.” “You see,” said the older painter, “our names are not actually identical—Pavlo Palii is my pseudonym.” “Indeed,” said the host excitedly, “I read that once in a catalogue. They listed your real name in parentheses, but I can’t remember what it was.” “It doesn’t matter,” the visitor said. “Take it,” said a voice as the hand appeared from behind the kylym.

“Here is my passport,” the host announced. Rather than opening it, he slapped it against his knee. Then he slapped it again. “So, what should we do?” he asked. “What was it you actually came for?” “Well, I wanted…,” the visitor got up from the ottoman and moved it again. “I wanted to ask you—no, to tell you, that our painting styles are so different. You’re a colorist. You started as a colorist—rather, as a disciple of the colorist style, isn’t that right?” “Yes, that’s right,” the host said. He swiped his very long, very black curls off his forehead with his passport. “That’s right,” he repeated, “Color is my element. What else did you want to know?” “What else?” the visitor echoed, “How long have you been showing your work?” “This is my first

exhibit. I finished art school just before the war," the host explained, tapping his chest with the passport three times. "I have been exhibiting as Pavlo Palii for thirty-six years. My work has been copied—I am an academic painter," the visitor said. "I know," said the host, pointing at the guest with the passport, "You were a professor at two art schools in the capital." "Three," the visitor corrected him. "I know, I saw your portrait," he said, using the passport to scratch behind his ear. "Well," the guest started, "I wanted to ask you … I want to know whether you might agree to…." "Oh, no—never," said the host, raising his passport above his forehead. "I have no reason to be ashamed of my name."

"I have no reason to be ashamed of my name," the host repeated, attempting to swat a fly on the painting with the passport. "You're still a novice, while I've already made a name for myself," said the visitor. "It's my name," said the host. "Alright," said the visitor, "but what you upstarts are doing—" "Discredits you, sir, and now people might confuse us—that is what unnerves you. I can do nothing to allay your agony," said the host, and scratched behind his ear with the passport. "But—" the visitor started to say. "I can do nothing to allay your agony. Bring me a cigarette," the host yelled out shrilly. "Here," the hand behind the curtain responded immediately. "Well, I was hoping…," continued the visitor. "How could you hope that a man would renounce his honorable, untarnished—" "Goodness, please, that is not what I had in mind," the visitor protested. "Looks like I'll need to ask you for a match after all," said the host. He was holding the passport and matchbox in one hand and a match with a red, rubbed out tip in the other. "Be my guest," the visitor offered. "Last match, and it won't light." "Here, help yourself," said the visitor, pulling out the wrapped packet in such a way that the newspaper fanned out into rectangles with corners somewhat tattered from repeated handling. The visitor held the unwrapped bundle

on his knees while the host helped himself to one of the seven matches. Alongside the matches lay a few crisp bills.

“I don’t know, I could even offer you—perhaps you’d want some money?” “For what?” said the host, squinting from the smoke, “For my name?” The younger painter feigned curiosity. “I don’t know, maybe you need money,” the visitor suggested. “How much would you pay for my name—how much have you got there?” the host asked. “Around two thousand—it’s all I have.” “Well, well, you wanted to buy an honorable name for two thousand,” said the host, dismissing the offer by waving the passport under his nose. He took a drag, blew out a cloud, and laughed. The older painter sat on the bench, newspaper, matches, and money on his lap. Slowly he began to wrap up the bundle, then, with a smile, exhaled through his nostrils. “I’ll take the checkered purple one,” the host yelled. “Fine,” the voice behind the kylym responded.

The younger man rose. The older man rose. On his way out the older man was still trying to stuff the newspaper-wrapped bundle into his pocket.

“Just a minute,” the woman called out, catching up the tubby gentleman at the third building he was passing. He stopped and smiled weakly: he was still holding the bundle. “I must tell you,” said the woman, “Your offer was doomed from the start——the chains of trams rattled and clanked —“I have to tell you, he likes to torment people.” She held on to his sleeve while he attempted to stuff the bundle into his pocket and two matches pierced the newspaper. “Two days ago, he told me: he—meaning you—will eventually come. He said so yesterday. And he repeated it this morning, and again an hour before you came. That is the kind of man he is.” (Jigsaws on strings rolled and jangled). Walking alongside him, she said: “No, he doesn’t need the money. Don’t think that he sent me—I just felt sorry for you.” “Don’t you care for him?” the man asked and noticed the woman’s bluish fingernails. “No, I don’t,” the woman

said, “He hates the older generation.” They separated for a moment to avoid some trash on the sidewalk. “Why did you marry him?” the man asked, trying to smile. (Oh, on the scooters of Aries… trams scraping by and jangling… and Buddhists in robes). “Because I love him,” said the woman. “Well—goodbye,” said the man, having finally shoved the bundle into his pocket. The woman stopped walking. He pulled two matches out of the bundle and hid them in his pocket. “A strange man,” thought the woman. She turned around and started walking away. (And vainly brainly buffounize, trumpetize, kurbidize on the reflection of razz, and jazz, and jazz, and jazz.) A little boy was playing on the curb. (Bygone epochs of human progress and our era are still very far from…). The woman thought that he was a nice boy. (Fields and forests greening, orchards blooming, a whiff of spring revives life that’s been dormant since—) She turned around and placed her hand on the boy’s head. (But soon the time will come when the mighty—) Then she disappeared into the building. (—outlandish powers of past rulers and the even omnipotent death) She paused before entering the apartment and wondered: “How is such a man made?”

How is such a man made? Easy. Take a piece of moist wheat bread and knead it until it becomes a four-cornered chunk. Once you have the shape, you can knead it any which way, even hitting it against a stone floor. Few know how to knead correctly, so it may be best to knead for a bit then leave it for another to take over. Then you dress the chunk in a jacket, pressed pants, even adding a tie, and then thoroughly rub his brain with books on all four sides. An old-world mother lies on her side on a bench and moans from time to time. At night she asks: “Are you happy, my children?” And the son answers: “Mother, how could a Slavic person be happy?” He will repeat that once or twice and then forget as soon as the bark on him hardens. He walks around the living room preening like a peacock, his

hands smoothing out his back, and smoking expensive cigarettes, while people examine and study his huge painting. And the bark on him will harden, it will harden. When the bark has hardened, then we know: worms have spread in the man's core, like in the grave. No one can see, because for that you would have to x-ray him. Our distinguished artist. Distinguished! Something must be done. He must be undressed: take off his jacket, pull off his socks, unbutton his shirt, and put him to bed "Oh, God," the man sighed and fell asleep.

Pavlo Palii (Pavlo Karpyha) said: "The horse was driven west by the hero and fell asleep." Later a nagging thought awakened him, one something like this: one should understand and forgive, forgive a lot, so conditions don't turn against you. The thought's lightness vanished when he woke up. He lay in bed for some time, arms wrapped around his sweaty chest. Then, suddenly, he guffawed explosively. He had come up with a formula for one poet and laughed at his own ingenuity. He even found his own lying in bed and laughing devastatingly humorous. He laughed again and again, in sudden explosive bursts. Then he remembered some hilarity from more than five years back and laughed again. He didn't remember what happened then between the newspaper and the censor, but he recalled that the whole affair was hilarious. "I'm probably coming down with a fever," the gentleman said, and dozed off. He dreamed that he couldn't get the thermometer from the room next door where Marta slept, then realized that his concern was real. "Now I am a man without a name," he whispered. Finally, he realized that the opening lines from some poem or song were playing in his head repeatedly, like this:

An order was given:
Hang him by the neck
From a spar.

Choose a godfather carefully! For all pirates are not equal.

Only the one who does not change his master

Will be up to the task—

Just so, from an adventure novel. “My God,” he thought, “I must have read it some forty years ago.” He once remembered the entire ballad but now was stuck on the opening lines:

An order was given:

Hang him by the neck!

“I am a man without a name,” he declared and fell asleep. He woke up and said: “a master of heaven and earth. Then he said: curse and write ‘goddamned Gdansk,’ or compose something like ‘mutton—glutton’ then make up a name like Raoul de Glutton. A man without a name is someone left on a desert island,” he added.

And what rode up the mast

Instead of the flag?

The long body of a rebel…

“It’s an interesting development when a man finds out about the bark,” he whispered. “Yes, it was bark if I’m not mistaken, simple tree bark, yet tasty when sweetened. Maybe man has already tasted the sweetened bark of every tree, for example, the bark of a birch tree. He had to cross the ocean, though: there isn’t any good bark in Europe. Did conquistadors who travelled to far off islands find a tree whose bark is tasty with sweetener? They made the long voyage, risked their lives. He was breathing heavily. How does it all connect?” He wondered.

The body of the rebel

Stretched like a flag

A brief moan—a rope pulled—that was all.

It doesn’t all fit. A cow will graze on any grass and a sparrow will eat any grain it finds, but man is different. A man will pick through thousands of grains to find the perfect one. He was inhaling and exhaling loudly. A man

wouldn’t bake bread from peas or bark. He wages wars for bread. It is deplorable, deplorable and bizarre.

Ale is vibrating in the chalices
Long live our commander!
At last mustachioed Francis Dreck
Is stepping on the deck.

Well, it should really be “Drake,” as in the ballad. This ballad should be called “Flag on the Mast” because the ending is about precisely that:

The Lion built the ships
Good craftsmanship all around.
The Lion wished to ascertain
That the earth was round.
A fiery ale courses in the veins
The proudly raised flag sways in the wind
Here comes the Lions ferocious ship,
A ferocious scoundrel on the seas.

“A ferocious scoundrel on the seas,” he said, and added, “I am a man without a name. I am shipwrecked on an island without bread or bark.” He breathed heavily. “I came to the conclusion: I must take my last breath and die. My death would make it convenient for people who have bread and bark yet won’t share with me.” He shook his head. “Humans have thrown out thousands of grains before finding the bread-baking one. Wars are waged for bread.” He shook his head again. “Though I’ve always been a logical man I do know one fairy tale. For the longest time the sea has been spewing primal slime. (I am a man without a name.) Much of the slime perished when it crashed against the rocks. (Marta, do you understand that I am a man without a name?) One tiny particle of slime didn’t crash (afterward in the exhibit hall the visitors withdrew and coughed ‘a man without a name’). The particle was nourished by the rocks and became a man. (How could you come up with this and not realize a man without a name). I know that a million years ago a particle of primal slime

thought exactly what I’m thinking: maybe I’m the first to survive without a protective shell, without a name. The little particle channeled the birthing contractions of the Earth, he said, and the intensity of that thought brought on sleep.”

“I like my small house,” he said when he woke up. “Recently people have been theorizing that a man can survive war and bombings if he has a sack of potatoes. (I like my small house.) The man carries this sack on his back because he knows that no matter where he goes there will be hunger at the end of the war. (I like my small house.) And this man is cunning: he stuffs his potatoes into smaller sacks because a large sack may be too conspicuous. (I like my small house.)” His breathing became labored again. “And there are other people,” he thought, “like an old granny who looks upon the pile of white logs cut and neatly arranged by a German. She thinks for a while, then says: ‘You could bake an Easter bread with this wood.’”

(—The banner is proudly raised!

Here comes the ferocious ship—)

He laughed aloud. “A man without a name is a man who will eat grass. He will be tested: either he survives, or he doesn’t. He laughed again and stroked his chest. In a nation there may arise a strong desire to fight another nation. Hatred may even be a progressive factor, but only for a time. Afterwards the consequences of hatred are worse than hatred itself. He laughed and stroked his chest. Time and again poets called for revenge—an eye for an eye—and their poems were featured in anthologies of literature. Today it sounds funny and pathetic. Today you cannot call for revenge: the impulse toward revenge will destroy the avengers, and then what. Everyone must liberate everyone.” He opened his eyes. “That means: every I will gather at the round table armed with the power of his own genius. You will come with a sack of potatoes, and I will bring my painting, but not this one—a different

painting. Let all work with their tools to create a new era: (Marta, where are my brushes? he called. I want to work now.) You with your potatoes, and I with my painting, and both of us without a name. Only the first step is difficult and frightening: to renounce your name. Will you survive without it?" He laughed and stroked his chest. "Then it will become easier. You'll harness the oxen and travel from Poltava to Cologne or to Buenos-Aires with granny sitting in the back. 'Who is he?' 'A man without a name.' 'What is he bringing?' 'Wit, un-human ingenuity, and un-human humanity.'"

(—a ferocious scoundrel on the seas…)

And his un-human humanity. Gradually, subdued by this thought, he fell asleep. Dreaming, he thought that a person's greatness lies in his dreams. A steelmaker and a poet both have dreams, only the ways in which they sculpt their dreams into reality are different, and how well they transform dreams into reality identifies them with groups, classes, or professions. He was a simple man; he could see it now in his dream. He never paid much attention to dreams, this too, he realized while dreaming.

(—a ferocious scoundrel on the seas…)

He got so wrapped up in his dream that he stopped pondering it and instead became its spectator. He saw a young boy running on the rails, waving his arms for balance. He distinctly felt that it was a youngster from an old Russian family, son of White émigrés. His name was Imperatuzov: he must have been from a good family. Peers, mostly girls, gathered around him clapping and yelling, "Vova Imperatuzov is taking a beating!" And indeed, someone hits Vova… When he woke up the dream lingered, and he began conceiving ways of killing people.

He contemplated killing methods. For instance, the killer drops two tiny seeds in the victim's coffee; but first he has to gain access to his coffee, perhaps gain the confidence of his wife, the one with bluish fingertips. But to do that he

would have to look younger, do something about his face. Oh, well, all this “eye for an eye” sounds so ridiculous and deplorable today… He was looking at the corner of the room, lit by the grayish light of the morning. There, a step away from the bed was the grandfather clock with elaborately outlined hours. They say it’s been showing twenty after four for two years now. Who knows when the clock’s final hour came: in the morning or afternoon? No rounding up to an hour, as in a story: it was exactly four twenty. His eyes swept around the room. He looked at the bookshelf divided into three vertical and five horizontal sections. The upper section had decorative glass and wood reliefs. Propped against the front ledge on top of the bookshelf were color copies of Dutch paintings: one depicting an interior and one with a marine theme. There was also a photograph of Olena Teliha. One hand of the clock pointed to another corner and a door. The adjacent wall was empty save for a stove, a small table, and a chair finished in a tasteful brown color. Next he saw a door, another door leading to Marta’s room, and again a corner. Propped up in the corner were rolls of paintings, his famous name was rolled up there. Yet another wall and a door leading to the porch. Two randomly chosen paintings hang on this wall, one of them with strokes of annoying yellow in the corner. A lamp with a ribbed shade bends like an old willow over two small chairs. A table stood on the kylym spread between two rooms. A grey morning filled the entire room. That kylym isn’t his, and all the rest was not his, all except these rolls of fame in the corner. No, the fame was also not his, the fame that didn’t belong to his name, the fame of the name that was not his own. He felt the urge to check on one of the paintings rolled face up. He pushed his bare feet down and stepped around the table toward the paintings. His paunch hung under his nightshirt like a nice-sized piece of meat. He was tiptoeing to keep his feet from getting cold when the door between the rooms

opened. There stood Marta, his companion of twenty years, a very sensible forty-year-old woman wearing a robe and a pince-nez. He quickly ran back to bed in his underpants on rickety feet.

“Would you like your coffee in bed, professor?” she asked, walking the length of the room toward the window. He wanted to say “I didn’t know,” but didn’t because of the hoarseness in his throat. He coughed and said, “I didn’t know if I should wake you last night.” “I will bring your coffee now,” she said, and added, “It must have been something important.” “Yes, I needed a thermometer” he answered. When she pulled back the curtains the contours of the table and the walls came into focus. “Twice last night I thought you weren’t asleep.” He hid his hands under the covers.

“You are feverish, professor, I see it in your eyes.” He wiped his forehead. “How did it go yesterday? I’ll be right back,” she said and left the room, holding her robe closed with her hand on her stomach. He scanned the traces of sweat on his palm, then sat up and looked out the window. Reddish sand covered the paths in the park. He saw the pine trees, fence, and a chestnut tree shooting off white blossoms. “Your coffee,” Marta came in carrying a tray. “I don’t want coffee today,” he said. “You need a beverage to start your day.” He bent his knees under the covers. “So how did it go yesterday?” she asked again. “I was waiting for you but fell asleep.” She put the tray on his knees. “Don’t spill it,” she warned. She sounded like a mother who asks her son about his exam. He wanted to respond but had already started to eat and merely nodded. “You are running a fever, professor,” she observed. She pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead. “I am not a professor,” he said. While he chewed, she put her palm on his forehead. “I am going to start from the beginning,” he finally chewed out his words.

She got up and walked across the room, straight and tall like a spear. “Couldn’t you come to some agreement with him?” she asked. “No, I couldn’t. I offered him money, but that’s not the point.” He took a bite of his sandwich. “I came to the conclusion that my visit was unnecessary.” “I don’t understand what is it you want to start from scratch,” she mused. He swallowed and continued, “I want a fresh start. I’m not a professor anymore. I am Pavlo Karpyha, the one in parentheses. Don’t be cross, Marta. Pavlo Palii has no value for me any more. God sent me the other Pavlo Palii.” “But you can’t hide, you are Pavlo Palii. What a disgrace,” she said putting the thermometer in the basket. “Don’t worry, Marta, it won’t be a disgrace.” “It will be a terrible disgrace,” she said, and left the room.

“It won’t be a disgrace,” he said. He took another bite of his sandwich and placed the tray on the table, saying “There will be no disgrace, come here, Marta.” “I still have a lot to do,” he said. “Your hair is grey,” she answered from her room. He picked up his coffee and said, “I simply don’t need a name.” “But you do. A man cannot exist without a name these days, professor,” she called in return. “I am not a professor, I am Pavlo Karpyha,” he protested.” “You are Pavlo Palii,” she insisted. He put his coffee down on the tray. “A name is not important. Please, come here, Marta. We are going to start again somewhere far away, where nobody knows us,” he said. “I got a letter from Canada.” He sucked air in so hard that his nostrils closed shut for a moment. A slight odor of shoe polish wafted from Marta’s room.

“Where is this letter,” she asked, standing in the doorway. She was still fastening her dress and wasn’t wearing her pince-nez. “When did you get it?” “The day before yesterday,” he answered, and picked up his cup. “Really? Why didn’t you mention it?” “I completely forgot about it,” he took a sip of coffee, “What I told you earlier isn’t so impossible. The letter is addressed to me, Pavlo

Karpyha.” She looked at him, straightening her dress. “Are you strong enough to begin again?” she asked. “Yes, I am,” he answered and closed his eyes. “I’m not a professor anymore; I’m Pavlo Karpyha from Lubni. You need to get used to it. Today I wonder why it hasn’t occurred to me that my name, Pavlo Karpyha, should not be obscured. The Karpyha line is very old, it goes back centuries. “I don’t like this idea of yours,” she said. “It’s a good idea, Marta. And you shouldn’t think for a moment that you aren’t attractive in that dark brown dress. I think that you are very, very pretty, and I want to paint your portrait.” “That’s enough. Drink your coffee and don’t talk nonsense,” she said.

She blushed for the first time, maybe for the last time, or maybe she didn’t blush at all, and it just looked that way, in that instant when she glanced at him finishing his coffee and smiled. He was her chatty one, with his hair white as cotton and his somewhat peasant eyes that reminded her of her late father’s. He was her friend, her ingenious pupil, her very own tubby gentleman.

Translated by Anna Bohoniuk-Golash
with the assistance of Oryna Shiffman

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Notes

[←1]

Мирославу Ягоді присвячується.

[←2]

Твори не потребують суфлера. В галереї “Три крапки”, що існувала у Львові за адресою вул. І. Франка (між 38 та 40 буд.) (кін. 80-х та поч. 90-х) був випадок, коли відкриття імпрези трафилося за відсутністю Автора, бо вирішив собі спокійно поїхати в гори.

[←3]

Dedicated to Myroslav Yahoda.

[←4]

Art works do not require a prompter. In the gallery “Three Points” that existed in Lviv on Ivan Franko street (between buildings 38 and 40) (from the late-80s to the early-90s) there was an incident when an event opening miraculously went off in the absence of the Author, because he had quietly decided to go to the mountains.

[←5]

The tune is *Tylko We Lwowie'* (Only in Lviv), a popular song written in 1939 by Henryk Wars and Emanuel Shlechter. (Translator's note)

[←6]

Vynnyky is a town located six kilometers east of Lviv. (Translator’s note)

[←7]

Including Dubliany (a suburb of Lviv). (Author’s note)

[←8]

Taras Prokhasko (b. 1968) is a prominent Ukrainian writer. One of his publications has the title *Z tsioho mozhna zrobyty kil'ka opovidan',* which translated as "One Could Make Several Stories from This." (Translator's note)

[←9]

Now Kost Levytskyi Street. (Translator’s Note)

[←10]

Some experts are inclined to explain the concept of Investor by the word InWestor—somebody who is in the West. (Author’s note)

[←11]

In this case, Andriy Kozytskyi and Stepan Bilostotskyi, authors of the extraordinarily informative study “The Criminal World of Old Lviv” (2001). (Author’s note)

[←12]

Authored by the very same, brilliant Andriy Kozytskyi and Stepan Bilostotskyi. (Author’s note)

[←13]

It was stolen by Pidkova's henchmen. His wife would later sew the head back onto the body with her own hair and this is how he would be buried. (Author's note)

[←14]

Another definition of the word “de-monstrator”—to be freed from the monster, un-monstered. In the sense of metaphorically getting rid of the creature in the criminal’s soul, real or imagined. (Author’s note)

[←15]

O. Kushchii and V. Sahaidak. The publication's name—*Smertnyk ne znav dnia smerti* (The Death Row Inmate Did Not Know the Day Of His Death 2001). (Author's note)

[←16]

The author used the Russian phrase “iz miestnykh,”, meaning “local, to note that the Soviet authorities occupying and ruling Lviv after WWII generally didn’t trust the indigenous population. (Translator’s note)

[←17]

Viacheslav Chornovil (1937–1999) was a prominent Soviet Ukrainian dissident who came in second place in the elections for the President of independent Ukraine in 1991. His death in a car accident in 1999 has been seen by some of his supporters as a political murder. (Translator’s note)

[←18]

In Polish—“GIVE BACK LVIV!”. (Translator’s note)

[←19]

In Soviet times Karpaty was the name of Lviv's soccer team and it continues to be so in independent Ukraine. (Translator's note)

[←20]

The Sich Riflemen (*Sichovi striltsi*) were a unit of the Army of the Ukrainian National Republic that fought for Ukrainian independence in 1917–19. (Translator’s note)

[←21]

In the original poem, the Ukrainian words translated as “affliction” and “affection”—*krov* (blood) and *liubov* (love), respectively—form a very popular and rather *clichéd* rhyming pair. (Translator’s note)

[←22]

Bohdan-Ihor Antonych (1909–1937) was an outstanding modernist Ukrainian poet, whose writings were very influential in Ukrainian culture of the second half of the 20th century and continue to be so today. Locating his neglected and unmarked grave at Lviv's Yaniv cemetery was something done by successive generations of late-Soviet Ukrainian intellectuals. (Translator's Note)

[←23]

All these individuals are buried at Lychakiv cemetery. Stepan Banach (1892–1945) was a leading 20th century Polish mathematician. Adam Kotsko (1882–1910) was a Ukrainian student activist who worked towards establishing a Ukrainian university in Lviv. He was killed in a conflict with Polish students. Zygmunt Gorgolewski (1845–1903) was a Polish architect who designed the Lviv Opera Theater. Ivan Levynskyi (1851–1919) was a Ukrainian architect and businessman who designed many modernist buildings in Lviv. Gabriela Zapolska (1857–1921) was a Polish writer and actress. Solomiya Krushylnytska (1872–1952) was a Ukrainian opera singer and one of the leadings sopranos in Europe in her time. Arthur Grottger (1837–1867) was a Polish Romantic painter and legendary lover of Wanda Monné. Ivan Trush (1869–1941) was Ukrainian painter and active community figure. Jan Zahradnik (1904–1929) was a Polish poet and literary critic. Nazar Honchar (1964–2009) was a Ukrainian poet and member of the Lu-Ho-Sad poetry group. Ivan Franko (1856–1916) was a one of Ukraine's most revered writers and community figures. Franciszek Smolka (1810–1899) was a Polish lawyer and politician. Markiian Shashkevych (1811–1843) was a Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Priest and a writer who was part of the Ruthenian Triad literary trio. Seweryn Goszczyński was a Polish Romantic poet and prose writer. Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910) was a Polish writer and activist for women's rights. Milena Rudnytska (1892–1979) was a Ukrainian women's activist and politician. (Translator's note)

[←24]

Jacek Kuroń (1943–2004) was a democratic opposition leader in Soviet-era Poland. He was born in Lviv. Józef Wittlin (1896–1976) was a Polish novelist, poet, and translator, who grew up and studied n Lviv. He is the author of the autobiographical work Mój Lwów (My Lwów; 1946). Yaroslav Okunevksy (1860–1929) was a Ukrainian civic leader who served as a general physician in the Austrian navy.

[←25]

Karol Bauer (1818–1894) botanist and landscape architect. He was involved in the design of Lviv's Lychakiv cemetery.

[←26]

The *Cmentarz Orląt Lwowskich* (Cemetery of Eaglets) is a burial place and cemetery within Lychakiv Cemetery where Poles who died in the Polish-Ukrainian War (1918–19) and the Polish-Soviet War (1919–21) are buried. (Translator’s note)

[←27]

With thanks to Eugenia Kononenko for her responses to my queries, and to Svitlana and Bogdan Babych of the University of Leeds for their helpful review of my translation.

[←28]

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